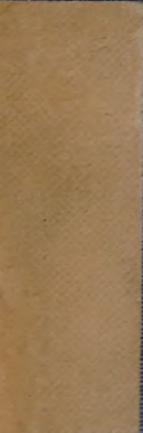


JOAN MORSE

ELIZA ORNE WHITE



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CATCHING A KITTEN

JOAN MORSE

BY

ELIZA ORNE WHITE

Author of 'Tony,' 'When Molly was Six,' etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO
MY YOUNG COUSINS
DOROTHEA, HELEN
AND
ELIZABETH
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

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Drawn by M. A. Benjamin

JOAN MORSE

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CHAPTER I

THE JOURNEY

JOAN was taking her first long journey. She was traveling all across the continent, from California to Boston. It was the first time that the little girl had ever been in a Pullman car. She was curled up in one of the seats looking at the landscape that flew by so fast that you did not have half enough time to see it. Her uncle was sitting opposite her reading a newspaper. Every now and then he looked over the top of his paper to see if she was all right. Joan liked her uncle because he was so kind. He never said much, but he always seemed to know what a little girl would like. After Joan's mother had died, she had gone, for a few weeks, to live with a lady who did not know at all what little girls liked. She had never had any children, and it seemed to Joan as if she never could have been a child herself. Of course she knew this was not possible. Her uncle had no chil-

dren, for he had never married, and yet he knew as well as if he could get inside of her just what Joan wanted. Perhaps it was because he was a doctor. Doctors might have learned ways of getting inside people. Her uncle knew, for instance, that what she wanted most of all was another child to play with. The very first night that they got on the train he had looked about, just as she had done, to see if he could find any trace of another child. There was not one to be seen, but there were two sections already made up, with the curtains drawn.

‘Perhaps in the morning a little girl may walk out from behind those curtains,’ said her uncle.

Joan flashed her quick smile at him and seized his hand. But in the morning no little girl came out; a sour-faced old lady came out from behind one set of curtains, and a very old man, who was lame, from the other. Joan and her uncle looked at each other. He shook his head. ‘There may be a little girl in one of the other cars,’ he said. ‘Perhaps we shall see her when we go into the dining-car.’

Joan found the walk to the dining-car very exciting, they had to go through so many cars. The cars jiggled so that it was very hard to

keep her balance. Finally her uncle took hold of her arm. There was a baby in one car who was screaming loudly as they passed, and a girl of fifteen in another, but in all that long train of cars there was no little girl for Joan to play with.

‘Perhaps she will get on at one of the other stations,’ said her uncle.

By the time they reached Chicago, and had only twenty-four hours left to travel, Joan knew everybody in the car. She liked them all except the sour-faced old lady; she could not like her. Everybody got out, and they did too.

When they were settled in another train, Joan looked eagerly about for a little girl. It was in the dressing-room that she first had a glimpse of one. She saw her first in the looking-glass. She was just her own size, with dark hair and eyes and a pale skin. Joan turned around to look at her, but the little girl had vanished. When she looked back into the glass, there was the little girl again. Oh, bother! It was only her own reflection looking back at her. Joan was very cross and she shook her fist at the looking-glass child.

She went to bed very early that night, so she

had no idea who would be in the other berths. She had grown used to the swinging train; a car seemed a homelike place. She was in no hurry to have the journey end. Her grandmother had never had any daughters; she had had two sons, Joan's father, who died when she was so young she could not remember him, and her Uncle Sandy. His real name was Alexander, but that was too long to say except on special occasions.

In the morning Joan looked eagerly around the car. There was not a child to be seen. Across the aisle, just where the cross old lady sat in the other car, a tall lady was sitting. She was not old, and she was not so very young. She had kind gray eyes and light brown hair. She was all in gray, and Joan called her the gray lady. When she got up to go into the dining-car for her breakfast, Joan saw how very tall she was — almost as tall as Uncle Sandy. Joan liked her looks so much that she made up her mind to visit her in her seat when she came back from the dining-car and find out where she was going and what her name was. She had found out a great deal about some of the passengers they had said good-bye to at Chicago. When she and her uncle went into

the dining-car, there was the lady in gray sitting at a table all by herself.

‘Please, Uncle Sandy, can’t we sit at the table where that lady is?’ said the little girl.

But her uncle sat down at a table where there was no one else. The lady had had an orange for breakfast; Joan could see the yellow skin.

‘Please, Uncle Sandy, can I have an orange?’ she said.

The lady was just finishing her coffee. She got up from the table to go back to the other car, and as she passed Joan she gave her a pleasant smile.

Joan was sure the gray lady had been the nicest sort of little girl. When they got back to their own car she was reading a magazine. Joan wondered if there were pictures in it. It had a yellow cover and there was no picture on the cover. Presently the lady closed the magazine and took out a pad of writing-paper and a pencil. ‘She is probably writing a letter to her little girl she has left behind,’ thought Joan. ‘I am sure she has one.’

After a time the lady looked across the aisle at Joan and smiled again and held up a stick of chocolate. Joan slid off her seat and skipped across the aisle.

‘For me?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ said the lady in gray.

‘All of it, or just a piece?’

‘All of it.’

‘But don’t you want some of it yourself?’

‘I have more. A dear little girl about your age gave it to me when I was coming away.’

‘I knew you had a little girl,’ said Joan.

‘She isn’t mine. She belongs to my sister.’

‘What is her name?’

‘Emily Norris.’

‘My name is Joan Morse. How old is Emily?’

‘Seven, and a piece over.’

‘I was seven a few days ago,’ said Joan. She began to munch the chocolate. ‘Oh, you must have some, it is so good,’ said Joan. She broke off a piece and gave it to the lady.

‘What is your name?’ Joan asked.

‘I am Miss Saunders.’

‘I like to know people’s first names,’ said Joan.

‘You could guess and guess and you could never guess my first name,’ said the lady in gray.

Joan guessed all up and down the alphabet, but the lady kept shaking her head. Finally Joan asked the letter it began with.

‘It begins with a J.’

This seemed a wonderful coincidence to Joan, because her own name began with a J. But she guessed everything she could think of, and she could not guess the lady’s name.

‘It isn’t Joan, is it?’ she asked at last.

‘Not quite, but I used to be called Joan sometimes when I was a child. My name is Joanna. It is a very ugly name.’

Miss Saunders gave Joan her block of paper and her pencil. ‘You can draw pictures if you like,’ she said. ‘I’ll send a picture back to Emily.’

Joan was delighted. To make a picture for a real little girl was the next best thing to playing with one. Uncle Sandy looked over the top of his newspaper to see how Joan was getting on.

‘I hope she isn’t bothering you,’ he said to Miss Saunders.

‘No, indeed.’

When Joan had finished her picture, she skipped across the aisle to show it to her uncle. ‘Oh, Uncle Sandy,’ she said, ‘she’s got a niece about as big as me, seven and a piece over, and her name is Emily Norris, and the lady’s name is Joanna Saunders, and they sometimes used to call her Joan when she was a child. Isn’t

that wonderful? I am glad my name isn't Joanna. Uncle Sandy, aren't you glad my name isn't Joanna?"

"Yes, I am very glad."

"Look at my picture, Uncle Sandy. I've made a picture of the train; see the smoke coming out of the engine, and see what a lot of cars there are, and that's me in that window. There wasn't room to put in more than a dot for my head, but it is me all right."

Presently Joan went over again and sat down on the seat by Miss Saunders. This time it was Joan who treated. She let Miss Saunders choose which she would have, a red gumdrop or a white one. They were all she had left. Miss Saunders chose the white one. Joan was glad, for she liked everything that was red — it was her favorite color. Joan and Miss Saunders sat with their gumdrops in their mouths. 'Mine is getting quite small,' said Joan, and she opened her mouth to show how very small the red gumdrop was now, as it rested on her red tongue.

Then Miss Saunders opened her mouth and showed how small the white gumdrop was. After this Joan felt they were really friends.

Uncle Sandy came across the aisle and of-

ferred his newspaper to Miss Saunders, and she gave him her magazine. Joan had to go back to her seat by her uncle, to find out if there were any pictures in it.

‘Please, Uncle Sandy, let me look at the pictures if there are any,’ said Joan.

‘There aren’t any pictures,’ said Uncle Sandy, ‘except in the advertisements. You can look at the advertisements at the back while I am reading the other part, if you can manage it.’

It was a long day because it was the last one. The first day had been even longer because it was the first. Joan could not remember much about the in-between-ones — they ran into each other and all seemed of a piece. They had their lunch together in the dining-car — she and Miss Saunders and Uncle Sandy. He and Miss Saunders found they lived not far from each other in Chicago. She was going to visit a sister on her way to her little farm in New Hampshire. Uncle Sandy asked a lot of questions about the farm. Joan wondered why grown people talked about such stupid things to each other. Uncle Sandy talked on such interesting subjects to her. He told her about cats and dogs he had known, and about other

children, and she liked to hear about such things, but she did not care whether Miss Saunders had greening apples or Baldwins or Tolman Sweets on her farm, or about the rotation of crops, whatever that might mean.

After they were back in the other car, Joan visited Miss Saunders again. 'Where do you get off?' Joan asked.

'At Springfield. And where are you going?'

When Joan told her Miss Joanna smiled. 'You must be Mrs. Elbridge Morse's granddaughter. I've seen your grandmother; I have a niece, just about your age, living in that town, and a nephew and an older niece, and a sister-in-law.'

'A niece just about my age?' Joan said.
'What is her name?'

'Maud Saunders.'

'Maud Saunders,' she repeated, 'and she's got a brother and a sister? What is her sister's name?'

'Bertha. She is nearly grown up.'

'And what is her brother's name?'

'Eliot.'

'Has she got a father?'

'No. Her father was my brother. He was killed in the war.'

‘I don’t like wars,’ said Joan.

‘Neither do I. I hope we’ll not see another one.’

Joan asked a great many questions about Maud Saunders. She found out the color of her eyes and hair, and that she liked to play with dolls.

After Miss Saunders got off the train, Joan and her uncle were very impatient to get to their journey’s end.

‘Uncle Sandy, why does time go so fast some days, and so slow other times?’

He paused to consider.

‘It went quick as a wink while Miss Saunders was telling me fairy stories. Uncle Sandy, will Grandmother meet us at the station?’

‘No, your grandmother isn’t very strong; she is an old woman, and it will be late when we get to Boston.’

‘Uncle Sandy, are you going to stay with us a long time?’

‘I wish I could, but I must get back to my patients.’

‘What happens to them when you are away if they get sick?’

‘Another doctor, a friend of mine, goes to see them.’

'I should think he could keep on going to see them,' said Joan. 'I am sure Grandmother and I ought to have you stay a long time.'

'I have been away a long time as it is,' said Uncle Sandy.

When Joan and her uncle reached Boston it was very cold, and so late that she longed to get into a warm bed. The station was very big and brightly lighted. There were people walking about, but no children except herself. Her uncle called a taxi and they got in and drove out into the suburb where Joan's grandmother lived. The taxi stopped before a large house. It was too dark to see it plainly. There were lights in the hall and in one of the front windows. Somebody inside had been watching for the sound of the taxi, for the door opened just as Uncle Sandy got to the top of the steps and Joan saw a tall lady in black with white hair.

'Well, Mother, how are you?' said Uncle Sandy, as he gave her a big hug. 'And this is Joan,' he added, before she could answer.

'My dear, what a large girl you are to be only seven,' said Joan's grandmother.

They sat around the fire in the dining-room, where they had hot chocolate and crackers. The room seemed very large indeed after the

narrow one on the train, and it seemed to be moving, for the motion of the train was still in Joan's head.

How sleepy she was! It seemed good to have all her clothes off and to be put into a real bed.

'Good-night, darling,' said her grandmother as she kissed her.

'Good-night,' said Joan. She fell asleep and dreamed that the lady in gray was putting her to bed, and that her grandmother's name was Joanna.

CHAPTER II

THE LOOKING-GLASS CHILD

JOAN was very lonely after her uncle went, and to add to her troubles, the trunk that her playthings were in had not yet come. And, besides, it was raining fast. Her grandmother always had her breakfast in bed, and this morning Joan had her breakfast all by herself in the big dining-room, with the high ceiling, and the polished floor that made one's footsteps sound so loud that when Joan walked there it sounded as if she were grown-up. The morning before she and her uncle had had breakfast there together — that was why she felt so lonely to-day. It would not have been so bad if she could have gone out to play, but nobody seemed to think a hard rain was the kind of a day for a child, who had a cold, to go out.

After breakfast, when she was in her own room again, she saw some children going past the house — a boy and a girl. The girl was just about her own age. She had yellow hair, and she wore a blue raincoat. Joan wished that she had yellow hair. She went over to a looking-

glass that stood in a corner of the room where she could see the whole of herself, and said to her reflection, 'Little looking-glass girl, you are all I have to play with.'

She made the looking-glass child talk back to her. 'I don't like your looks very well,' said the looking-glass child.

'If you think I like your looks any better than you like mine, you are very much mistaken,' said Joan.

The looking-glass child looked at Joan, and Joan looked at the looking-glass child.

'What is your name?' asked the looking-glass child.

'Joan.'

'What a horrid name!' said the looking-glass child. Joan made the looking-glass girl talk in a high, squeaky voice.

'I may have a horrid name, but you have a horrid voice,' said Joan. 'What is your name?'

'My name is Christabel,' said the looking-glass child.

'That is a pretty name,' said Joan, 'but I think you are much too pale, and I don't like your brown hair and your brown eyes. You look as if you had not had enough to eat — you look half-starved.'

‘The same to you,’ said the looking-glass child.

The door opened and Delia, the maid, came in to make Joan’s bed. Joan was sitting demurely by the window, looking at a picture book when Delia came in.

‘I thought I heard you talking to some one,’ said Delia.

‘There isn’t any one here,’ said Joan. She could not tell Delia how she pretended her image in the looking-glass was another little girl. She knew Delia would think her silly. She got up and took the other side of the bed.

‘That is right, you are smoothing out all the wrinkles; you are a good bed-maker,’ said Delia. ‘But it is too cold for you to stay in this room. Your grandmother said for you to come into her room, where there is a fire. There is something there for you to play with. I got her out after you went to bed last night.’

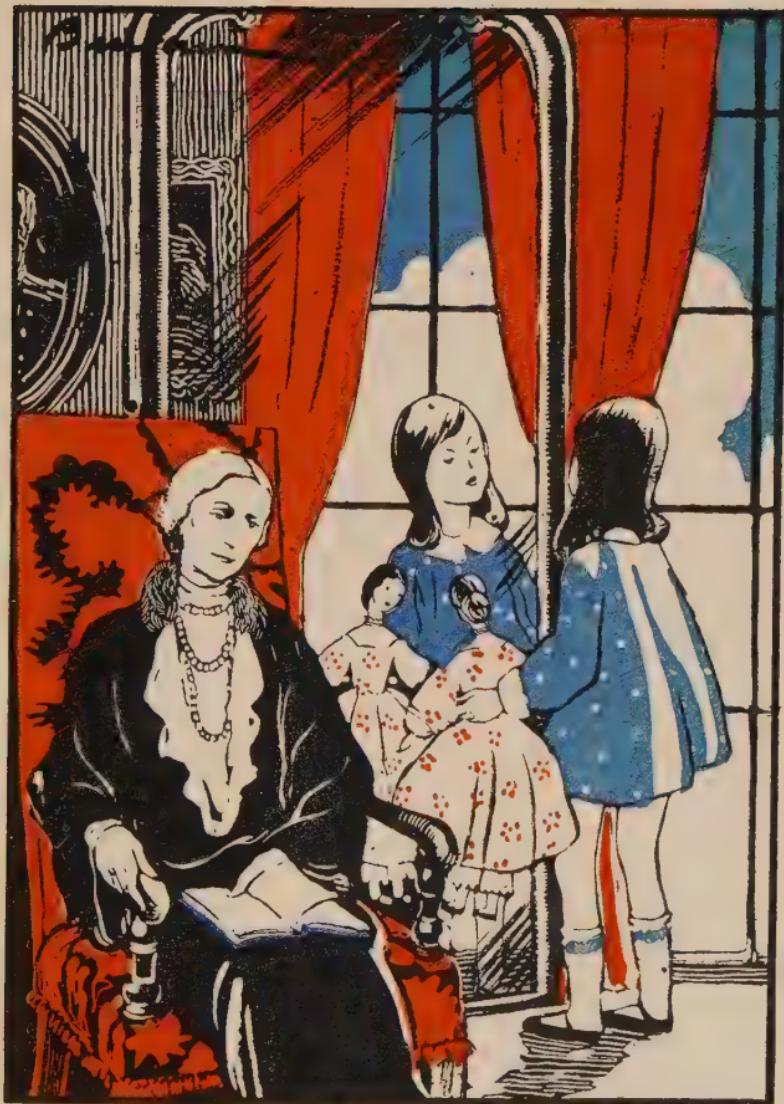
‘You got her out — did you say her? It must be a doll,’ said Joan

‘I got it out,’ said Delia.

‘It must be a doll. What is her name?’

‘Her name is Betsy, and she is very old.’

Joan went eagerly into her grandmother’s room. First she knocked timidly at the door.



THE LOOKING-GLASS CHILD

‘Come in, Joan,’ said her grandmother.

Mrs. Morse was sitting up in bed with a small table with very short legs across her lap. On it was a tray with her breakfast. Her grandmother’s hair was almost as white as the pillows behind her. Her eyes were brown, like Joan’s, and she was thin like Joan. Indeed, the two looked so alike that it seemed as if Mrs. Morse had been a child like Joan only yesterday, and that Joan would be an old woman like her grandmother to-morrow.

‘Come and kiss me, my darling,’ said her grandmother. Joan felt warm and comfortable when she heard this, for she liked to be called ‘My darling.’

‘When I have finished my breakfast,’ said her grandmother, ‘I thought you would like to take this table off my bed and put it on the window seat and give Betsy her breakfast. She is sitting in her chair on the window seat, and her dishes are there.’

‘Oh,’ cried Joan, ‘how wonderful!’

‘Yes, she is wonderful. Your Uncle Sandy calls her “The Hundred and Wonder,” because she is a hundred and one years old.’

Joan went over to the window and clasped Betsy in her arms.

‘Did you play with her when you were a little girl?’ Joan asked.

‘Yes, and so did my mother before me. You see, as she is of wood, she can’t get broken.’

‘What nice clothes she has, Grandmother!’

‘Her clothes, most of them, got worn out. Some of them are old, and those I put away, and some of them I made for myself, when I was a little girl, and some of them are newer still, and I am going to let you make a new set for her.’

‘But I don’t know how to sew,’ said Joan.

‘That is all the better. It is great fun, learning to sew by making one’s doll’s clothes.’

‘I have finished my breakfast, Joan,’ her grandmother said, a little later. ‘You can set my tray on the big table, and then you can have the little table to play with. Take off the cream pitcher first so that you won’t spill anything. You are a handy child.’

Again Joan felt warm and comfortable, at this praise. The tea set was one that her grandmother had played with when she was a little girl. There was a teapot without a cover, for the cover had got broken, a sugar bowl, a cream pitcher, and three cups and saucers.

The others had been lost or broken. There were four plates, and some knives and forks and spoons. The china had sprigs of green leaves and tiny pink flowers all over it.

‘Oh, Grandmother,’ Joan cried in delight, ‘how nice it is to have a tea set to play with to-day! I have one in my trunk, but goodness knows when that will come.’

‘I am sorry I have only make-believe food for Betsy this morning,’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘I hope to have some crackers and cheese for her to-morrow, and some real milk. You might pour some of my cream into her cup, as you are a handy child. Hold the cup over the waiter while you pour lest you spill. I wish Betsy could tell us all she has seen. If only dolls could talk! She has lived through three wars. She was over forty at the time of the Civil War, so she can remember that well, and then, there was the Spanish War in 1898, and last of all, the World War. If only we could get her talking!’

‘I don’t like to hear about wars,’ said Joan.

‘I don’t either,’ said her grandmother, ‘so perhaps it is just as well she can’t talk.’

‘She can talk all right,’ said Joan. ‘My dolls always talk.’

‘To be sure,’ said her grandmother. ‘Mine always did, too.’

Joan had a happy morning with Betsy, and her grandmother had a happy morning writing letters and watching them play. Once in a while Joan would look out of the window to see if it was still raining, and it always was.

‘Couldn’t I go out, Grandmother, just for five minutes?’ she asked.

‘No, dear.’

‘I hardly have any cold.’

‘I know. I want you to get all over it before you go out.’

‘There are other children out, Grandmother. I saw some children go past the window this morning.’

‘I dare say. They probably did not have colds, and they have not just come from California.’

Joan could not help wishing for a little girl to play with. In California there had always been a little girl. She wished she knew some little girls here, and she said so to her grandmother.

‘Little girls?’ said her grandmother. ‘Aren’t you happy with me and Betsy?’

‘Yes, Grandmother,’ she said dutifully. It was impossible to explain to her grandmother

how she really felt. She hardly knew herself; she was not unhappy, for her grandmother was so kind, but she did want a little girl to play with.

‘Grandmother,’ Joan said, ‘do you know a girl by the name of Maud Saunders?’

‘I know her mother; I don’t know the child herself.’

‘Do you think she would come and play with me?’

‘I dare say she would if I were to ask her, but I don’t like her mother very well. Her father was a delightful man.’

Joan meditated. ‘She might take after her father,’ she said, for she had often been told how much she herself was like her father.

‘She might, but she might be like her mother. Aren’t you happy playing with me?’

‘Yes,’ said Joan, ‘but I’d like a little girl to play with.’

‘Even if she were a self-willed, trying little girl?’

‘Yes,’ said Joan, ‘I’d like any kind of little girl to play with.’

‘I see. There are some very nice children who have moved into the neighborhood — Harriet and Asa Lane — a girl about fourteen

and a boy about your age. I have been meaning to ask their aunt to let them come to see you.'

'A boy wouldn't be any good,' said Joan. 'He wouldn't like to play with dolls. Maud likes to play with dolls — her aunt said so.'

'Where did you see her aunt?'

'On the train; she was very nice, and she let me draw pictures, and she told me all about her niece, Maud Saunders.'

'Yes, her aunt is very nice,' said Mrs. Morse. 'But I am sure the Lanes are nicer children, and then there are the Marshes, who are just about your age.'

They all had their dinner together in the dining-room — Mrs. Morse, Joan, and Betsy. Betsy sat in her own chair which was put on top of another chair. They had oyster broth for dinner, and the oyster crackers were just the right size for Betsy.

'They are big crackers for her,' said Mrs. Morse. 'They are her pilot bread.'

The next morning, Joan got up very early and tiptoed across the room to the looking-glass. The looking-glass girl looked back at her with her brown eyes. She had on a white nightgown just like Joan's.

‘You have got on a very ugly nightgown,’ said the looking-glass girl. ‘It is just plain and sensible.’

Joan was whispering, for she did not want any one to hear her talking. ‘I don’t think you are very polite to say such things about my nightgown, and, anyway, yours is just as ugly as mine,’ said Joan.

‘Oh, Christabel, I had such a very happy time yesterday. I played all day with Betsy. You know Betsy?’

‘Of course, I do,’ said Christabel.

‘I am to make clothes for her,’ said Joan. ‘I shall make pretty clothes, Christabel, not the sensible kind you and I have to wear. And I am to have pretty clothes, too. I will tell you a secret, Christabel. Grandmother and I are going shopping the first pleasant day when her rheumatism is better.’

CHAPTER III

FINDING THE KITTENS

‘I WISH I could have a kitten to play with,’ said Joan one day to her grandmother.

‘I think this must be about the twentieth time you have said that,’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘You know what I have told you; — don’t you remember what it was?’

‘Yes,’ said Joan. ‘You told me it would be too great a responsibility; but I would take care of it; and you said it might get lost; but if it did, why, then, you wouldn’t have it; and you said you would get too fond of it, and something always happened to them; but you needn’t get fond of it, truly, you needn’t, Grandmother. I would keep it away from you. Please, Grandmother, mayn’t I have a kitten? It would be almost as good as a little girl to play with.’

‘You know what I have said; you remember very well.’

Joan thought she saw signs that her grandmother was weakening.

‘Suppose I found a kitten, Grandmother,

suppose I found one in the bushes in the back yard,' said Joan.

'Suppose a fairy tale,' said her grandmother.

'Yes, I'll make one up,' said Joan. 'Once there was a little girl, and she was very sad and lonely because she had no mother or father and no brothers and sisters, and no children to play with, and she just longed and longed for a kitten. And she lived with a very dear grandmother who was a witch, and when Joan said to her grandmother, "I want a kitten to play with," the witch said, "You shall have one; run out into the back yard and see what you can find." And Joan ran out, and she found a beautiful Persian kitten in the bushes, yellow, quite small, and with yellow eyes, and they all lived happily together ever after. Please, Grandmother, if I find a kitten in the bushes, may I have it?'

'If you find one there that has come of itself you may have it,' said her grandmother.

And so after this, Joan went every day to the back yard and looked in the bushes to see if she could find a kitten. She often saw cats there, and she thought a cat would be the next best thing to a kitten. She was sure if she could catch one of those half-famished creatures her

grandmother would let her have it. There was a lanky one she called Mr. Bones. She tried to catch him, but he always slipped away from her as if he were terribly frightened. She begged milk and scraps of food from Nora, the cook, and she had a place that she called the dining-room, where she put the food. But, although Mr. Bones seemed pleased with the food in the dining-room, he always scampered away if she tried to catch him. There was another thin, sad-eyed cat who came around a great deal. She looked as if the cares of this world had been too hard. She was a tiger with white paws.

‘She’s a mother, I think,’ said Nora. ‘You can call her Mrs. Mixter.’

‘Oh, Nora, do you suppose Mrs. Mixter has any children?’ Joan asked.

‘I am pretty sure she has, for I’ve seen her hurrying away as if she wanted to get home as fast as she could.’

‘Home!’ Joan repeated the word rapturously. ‘Home! Where is her home?’

‘I’m not able to say, but it surely isn’t in this back yard that is so public and full of stray cats and dogs. Maybe it is under the front porch, and maybe it’s under the white

rosebush, and maybe it's under the rhododendron bushes. There's many a cozy home for kittens.'

So Joan began to play in the front yard. There were interesting sights to be seen; there were children passing by on their way to school. There were two girls who usually were together, walking along hand in hand. They were both her own age. One was the little girl she had seen before, with the yellow hair and a sweet mouth, and she always looked happy and made Joan think of the sunlight. The other had dark eyes and an eager face. Sometimes she seemed happy and sometimes cross, but always very much alive. Often at other hours of the day the girl with the yellow hair would come along with a boy who was not so tall as she, but looked older, and Joan was sure he was her brother.

'Who is the girl with the yellow hair, who is bigger than her older brother?' she asked her grandmother one day.

'I am sure I don't know. There are a good many children who pass this house on their way to and from school. Call me the next time you see them.'

One day when her grandmother and Joan

were in the parlor she saw them go by. 'Grandmother, here they are.'

Mrs. Morse came to the window. 'They are Tony and Laura Marsh,' she said. 'They are twins; they are the children I hope to have you play with some day, but I do not know their mother. I must get Miss Hattie Lane to take me to call on her.'

'But, Grandmother, what difference does it make about their mother? I don't care about knowing her.'

'All things must be done properly,' said her grandmother. 'When I get over this attack of rheumatism I'll make a few calls.'

It was that very afternoon that something happened that was so thrilling that Joan danced up and down in excitement. She was standing quite far from the street by the side of the house, and as she looked at the rhododendron bushes she thought, 'I wonder why their leaves look so green and it is only April, and all the other trees and bushes look quite dead'; and as she thought this, she saw a flash of a tiny tail that was white at the end and a tiger-gray at the top. How wonderful! Yes, she couldn't be mistaken; it was a tail that belonged to a tiger kitten. It was a scared little

thing, but it was so very small that perhaps it would let her catch it. And while she stood thinking, something flashed by in the opposite direction. A tiger kitten. And then she noticed that there was only a scrap of white on this tail. Had she forgotten how the tail looked? Or were there two kittens — twins, like Tony and Laura? And if there were two, would her grandmother let her keep them both? She wondered if they were Mrs. Mixter's children. She thought it wiser not to tell her grandmother about them. She knew what she would say; she would say that it was impossible that there could be two kittens, and that she could not catch them. But she had to tell somebody about them, so she told Nora.

‘Nora, what do you suppose I saw to-day under the rhododendron bushes?’ she asked.

Nora was moulding some biscuit, small ones for Joan, and larger ones for the rest of the family.

‘A young bear cub?’ said Nora.

‘Something much nicer than that.’

‘A rhinoceros?’

‘Nora, how silly you are! It was something that really could be in our yard.’

‘A puppy?’

‘It was far nicer than a puppy.’

‘Nothing could be nicer than a puppy,’ said Nora, as she put her biscuit in the oven.

‘Well, anyway, it’s nicer for me, for it is something I can have if I can catch it. It is Mrs. Mixter’s child — a tiny little tiger Mixter. And, oh, Nora, I am sure there are two.’

‘Two?’ Nora herself was fairly astonished.

‘Two,’ said Joan firmly.

‘What makes you think there are two? It isn’t at all likely. It is probably the same kitten coming back.’

‘But it couldn’t have a tail that was most half white when it went off, and come back from the way it didn’t go, with just a tiny white tip,’ Joan objected. ‘That isn’t possible.’

‘You probably didn’t half look at it, it went so fast,’ said Nora.

‘I know there are two,’ said Joan. ‘There are two children in almost every house.’

‘Well, anyway,’ said Nora, ‘you won’t be allowed to have but one, so if you do catch them, you’ll have to take your choice.’

‘If there are two and I can catch them, I shall have them both,’ said Joan. ‘Grandmother is a kind person; she would never be so cruel as to separate twins.’

After this Joan went every day to the rhododendron bushes. Sometimes she saw the flash of a tail with a scrap of white at the tip, and sometimes the flash of a tail that was almost half white. She was sure there were two kittens, but Nora kept saying that she was so excited that she didn't know what she saw. 'You never seem to see two at a time,' she said.

Joan began to take milk out into the yard. At last, one day, Nora saw a kitten. It had a tiny bit of white on the end of the tail.

'Mrs. Mixter hasn't been around for a long time,' said Nora. 'I'm afraid she isn't coming any more. Probably some one has sent her to the Animal Rescue League. If so, the kitten is so small it will probably starve unless we can catch it.'

'Kittens,' said Joan with decision.

'Kitten,' said Nora. And then, while they were looking, the tiny thing came out from under the rhododendron bush. It ran away, but this time Joan ran quickly after it, and, oh, thrilling moment, she caught it! The kitten scratched and tore at Joan's hand with its small claws. It hurt her so much she nearly dropped it.

'Hold on fast,' said Nora.

Joan took the struggling kitten into the house and dropped it on the kitchen floor. 'Oh, Nora, what a darling thing!' she cried in delight.

'It is all right,' said Nora.

'Do you think it is a boy or a girl, Nora?' Joan asked.

'A boy, he is so brave. We'll call him Tommy.'

'Tommy? What a nice name for a kitten,' said Joan. 'But I must find the other one.'

'You were only promised one.'

'Then you can have the other one, Nora.'

'I don't feel any particular need of a young kitten. I've enough work already.'

She was warming some milk as she spoke. She tried to make the kitten drink, but Tommy was so little that he could not manage it.

'I shall have to get a teaspoon and feed him that way,' said Nora.

'Nora, don't you think it would be better not to show the kitten to Grandmother until we get his sister?' Joan asked.

'It isn't at all likely there's another one,' said Nora.

'But I know there is. It's a girl and her name is Tilly.'

‘I suppose she told you her name as she passed by,’ said Nora.

‘It came to me that her name is Tilly,’ said Joan.

And the next day when she visited the rhododendron bush, there was a kitten with a long piece of the tail white. ‘Oh, Tilly,’ she cried, rapturously, ‘my darling Tilly!’

But Tilly was so scared and ran so fast that Joan could not catch her. The next day to her great joy, she did catch her. Tilly was not so strong as Tommy. She was a size smaller. ‘Just like Tony and Laura,’ said Joan, ‘only Laura’s bigger. I should think twins would be the same size. Why aren’t they the same size, Nora?’

‘If I could answer questions like yours, I shouldn’t be in your grandmother’s kitchen; I should have an important position.’

Now that she had the two kittens Joan felt the time had come to tell her grandmother about them. The next morning Joan put them into a covered basket and took them up into her grandmother’s room. She had just finished her breakfast and was lying on the sofa.

‘See, Grandmother, what I found in the bushes,’ she said.

Mrs. Morse lifted up the cover of the basket and out popped a little head.

‘That is Tilly,’ said Joan.

‘You don’t mean to say you really found that kitten in our bushes?’

‘I did. It was just like the fairy tale, only she wasn’t an Angora. But it was better, for she was twins.’

‘Twins?’ said her grandmother.

‘Twins,’ Joan repeated. She pushed up the other division of the basket and up popped another head. ‘That is Tommy,’ said Joan.

Mrs. Morse leaned back in a helpless way on the sofa. ‘Where is their mother?’ she asked. ‘They are too young to do without a mother.’

‘I’m afraid she’s lost or at the Animal Rescue League,’ said Joan. ‘But I’ll be their mother. I’ll take the best of care of them, and Nora will help. We have to give them milk in a teaspoon.’

‘How long have you had them?’

‘We’ve had Tommy since Tuesday, and I caught Tilly yesterday.’

‘Did you remember I said you could have a kitten if you found one? I said nothing about two kittens.’

‘No,’ said Joan, ‘but you didn’t say I could

not have two kittens.' She lifted a corner of the basket again. 'Did you ever see anything so sweet?' she asked.

'They are all right now,' said her grandmother, 'but they will grow into cats.'

'Not for a long time, not for months and months, not for a year.'

Joan saw that her grandmother was going to let her keep the kittens and her delight knew no bounds.

'It is such a nice fairy tale,' she said.

'You think so. I am not so sure, for I don't know how it is going to end.'

'It will end, "And they all lived happily together ever after,"' said Joan.

CHAPTER IV

OLD LIGHTS AND NEW

JOAN had lived in so many different places in her short life that she had learned to make herself at home wherever she was. Here at her grandmother's it was pleasant in many ways, and there were other things about it that she did not like. She loved her grandmother, with her friendly smile and her kind eyes. She liked the things she had to eat, and the pretty china on the table, and the dainty silver. What she did not like was some of the furniture, for Joan had as decided a taste about furniture as about people. She liked the mahogany bureau in her room with the looking-glass over it, that had a fat bunch of gilt grapes hanging down from the top of the frame. The brass handles on the bureau gave her pleasure every time she pulled out a drawer. And she liked the other mirror, where she could see her whole reflection and talk to Christabel. But she did not like a black walnut writing-table that was in her room. It had all sorts of gimcracks on it, and a felt top that was

an ugly shade of green bordered by an edge with a Grecian pattern. The table had a convenient drawer, to be sure, where she could keep her writing materials. She had a block of paper for all informal letters, such as the ones to Uncle Sandy, and a box of note-paper, with a colored picture at the top of each sheet, on which to write all special letters, like the ones to Miss Joanna and the little girls she knew in California.

It was a great thing to have Tilly and Tommy to play with, but she was looking forward eagerly to knowing some little girls, and this might happen any time now, for her grandmother had been well enough to make a few calls.

The first caller was Harriet Lane, who came with a basket of oranges and asked Joan to lunch at her house. Joan had a delightful afternoon, for besides Harriet's brother, Asa, Tony and Laura Marsh were there. The next day, when she was told that a little girl and her mother wanted to see her, she was sure it was Laura and her mother, and she ran into the parlor with her face in a glow and her hand outstretched. She drew back for an instant when she found it wasn't Laura.

‘I am Maud Saunders,’ said the little girl. ‘My Aunt Joanna told me to come to see you. Who did you think I was?’

‘I thought it was Laura Marsh. I played with her yesterday at the Lanes’.

‘So that is where Laura was going yesterday. Laura is my best friend,’ Maud explained.

‘I think she is perfectly lovely,’ said Joan.

‘I don’t expect you’ll see much of her,’ said Maud, ‘for she’s my best friend — we are always together.’

At last Joan was having her heart’s desire, a little girl to play with. This was a great thing, but she wished the little girl had not been so disagreeable about Laura. Joan looked at her grandmother, who was trying to be polite to Mrs. Saunders, who seemed to be very scornful.

‘I see you still have gas,’ Mrs. Saunders was saying. ‘We had electric lights put in some years ago. We could not stand the smell of the gas.’

‘The smell of the gas?’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘We have never had a burner that leaked.’

‘There is a strong smell of gas in this room,’ said Mrs. Saunders. ‘There is always a smell of gas wherever there is a pilot. I am sure Joan

must smell it, with her keen little nose, and it is bad for her.'

'I don't think Joan has ever noticed it.'

'Oh, yes, I have, Grandmother, lots of times.' She did not like Mrs. Saunders, but she disliked the smell of gas even more.

'Well, it costs too much to put in electric lights, and gas suits me perfectly, as it did my mother before me,' said Mrs. Morse.

'It smokes up one's ceilings so,' said Mrs. Saunders, and she glanced at the ceiling above the chandelier where there was a dark patch.
'I was always having my ceilings done over.'

'I wonder if you'd like to come into the other room and play blocks?' said Joan to Maud.

'Blocks?' Maud asked.

'Yes, blocks. Grandmother had them when she was a little girl. I have lots of fun with them, for I pretend I'm building all sorts of things — houses and barns and stores.'

'I guess you have to do a lot of pretending,' said Maud when she saw the basket of blocks, shaped like very small bricks. 'I saw your grandmother's doll at the doll show the other day. I think she is very queer and old-fashioned.'

Joan fired up. 'I think she's the best doll in the whole world,' she said. 'Any little girl might be glad to have a doll to play with that is a hundred and one years old. I'd a great deal rather play with her than with one of the new-fashioned dolls. She can't get broken.'

'My Adrianna is at the doll show. She is a lot prettier than your doll. I'm sure she'll take the prize.'

'I don't care whether Betsy takes a prize or not,' said Joan. 'I just love her. If you just love anything you don't care how it looks.'

'Well, I do,' said Maud, and yet she was considerably impressed.

'If you don't care for blocks,' said Joan, 'we'll get the kittens and play with them.'

Here things went better, for Maud was fond of kittens.

Maud liked Joan; she liked the way she stood up for her old-fashioned doll. She felt as if Adrianna were very young and foolish. Joan thought Maud rather disagreeable, but, after all, she was a little girl and that was a great thing.

'I think your Aunt Joanna is lovely,' said Joan.

'Yes, she's all right. I think your grand-

mother seems pretty old. Do you like living all by yourself with such an old lady?’

‘She isn’t very old,’ said Joan loyally. ‘I like living with her very much indeed; I just love it. I like it a lot better than I should like living with your mother.’

Joan had not meant to be so rude, but really Maud was too provoking.

‘My mother is all right,’ said Maud. ‘She’s the best mother in the whole world.’

‘The best for you,’ said Joan, ‘but my grandmother is the best grandmother in the whole world, and Betsy is the best doll in the whole world.’

‘I always go and stay part of the summer on the farm with my Aunt Joanna,’ said Maud. ‘I like the farm, for there are such lots of animals there.’

‘Animals?’ said Joan. ‘What?’

‘Cows and a bossy-calf, and hens and chickens, and a dog, and horses. Aunt Joanna stays there all summer, and the farmer and his wife are there all the year round. It’s the nicest farm in the whole world.’

While Joan and Maud were having this talk, Mrs. Saunders continued to talk about the advantages of electric lights.

It troubled Mrs. Morse to think that Joan could smell gas in the room. She never had these burners with pilots in a bedroom, but she had not supposed they would do any harm in the other rooms. The next time she saw the doctor she asked him about it. He thought there was no danger to Joan's health in having the gas. 'And yet,' he said, 'if you once get rid of it you will never regret it. No odor, no smoky ceilings, no matches to bother with, and always a bright light.'

Mrs. Morse decided to keep to her gas and kerosene lamps. If there were no danger to health, why change? She liked the soft gas-light, and she could not well afford the expense of electricity.

The next time Uncle Sandy came to stay with them he said, 'Mother, you must put in electric lights.'

He had come on to Boston to some important medical meetings, and he was away most of the day, and often in the evening. In fact, he was away so much that Joan had had a great deal of trouble in getting him to take any notice of the kittens. She caught one of them when he was at breakfast the first morning and brought it in, struggling in her arms.

‘Isn’t she too sweet, Uncle Sandy?’ she asked.

‘Bless my soul! Has it come to this, that Mother has a cat?’ he said, as he poured some maple syrup on a griddle-cake.

‘It isn’t a cat, it’s a kitten,’ Joan said. ‘Ouch! She scratches like the mischief.’

‘Why don’t you drop her?’ Uncle Sandy asked. ‘Kittens have legs.’

‘That’s just the trouble, Uncle Sandy. Grandmother says I mustn’t let them out of my arms if I bring them into this part of the house. Ouch!’ she cried again. ‘Her name is Tilly,’ she confided to her uncle. ‘There are two of them — twins.’

‘Two of them? Good gracious, two objects that will grow into cats! How did you persuade your grandmother to let you have them?’

‘I don’t know. I found them in the yard. She said I could have a kitten if I found it in the yard, and I did find two. Ouch!’ said Joan again, and she went out into the kitchen with the struggling Tilly.

‘Uncle Sandy isn’t fond of kittens,’ she said to the cook. ‘He doesn’t care a bit about them. When I said there were two he never asked to see Tommy. I told him they were twins, and

he never asked Tommy's name or whether he was a boy or a girl kitten.'

'I suppose he has something else on his mind,' said Nora. 'He's come on to attend medical meetings, not to look at kittens.'

'If he were truly fond of kittens they'd be quite as important as medical meetings,' said Joan.

She was disappointed in Uncle Sandy. He was so kind in some ways that she could not understand why kittens were so unimportant to him. He had plenty of time to think about how poor the gas was.

'I can't see myself in the glass,' he said to his mother. 'That gas jet in my room is enough to drive a saint crazy.'

'Then there's no danger for you, Sandy, you will be sure to keep your wits.'

Joan laughed. Her grandmother and uncle always behaved like two children. Really, she and Maud did not behave worse.

'Well, Mother,' he said, 'as you are a saint, I have fears for you.'

'How about me and Betsy?' Joan asked.

'I don't think you are in any danger,' said Uncle Sandy, 'but I have great fears for Betsy. As she has been such a saint for all these years,

it would be terrible to have her temper spoiled by the effect of so much gas. I think it would be safer for Betsy if electric lights were put in.'

'The gas is poor in your room, for I don't dare to have pilots in bedrooms,' said his mother.

'I should think not,' said Uncle Sandy. 'And that reminds me, Mother, that there is a strong smell of escaping gas in the house. I noticed it the moment I came in. It isn't healthy, especially when you have so little fresh air. You must put in electric lights.'

'I asked my doctor about it and he thought it wouldn't do us any harm, and as far as the light is concerned, gas is good enough for me, and if it suits my old eyes and Joan's young eyes, I am afraid it will have to do for you, as you are here only for a few days in the whole year. I can't afford electric lights.'

'That is another matter. Now we are getting at the truth.'

'Joan and I get on very well with the gas,' she repeated.

'I hate gas, Grandmother, truly, I do,' Joan burst out unexpectedly. 'It has such a queer smell, and it makes the ceilings so black. I never had gas until I came here.'

'I think if an old woman past seventy can get along with gas, a child of seven can.'

Joan was silent. Her uncle looked at her with a kind smile.

'I suppose if somebody gave you a present of electric lights you would accept it,' he said to his mother.

'There is no need for anybody to do so rash a thing,' she said. 'It might cost a thousand dollars to put electricity into every corner of this rambling old house. It isn't worth while, Sandy. I'm an old woman and Joan is a little girl.'

It was plain to see that the more Uncle Sandy wanted electric lights, the more grandmother did not want them, and the more she did not want them, the more Uncle Sandy did want them. It made her think of a day when she and Maud had squabbled over what game they should play. Joan had wanted to play dolls, and Maud had wanted to play ball; and the more Maud wanted to play ball, the more Joan wanted to play dolls. She could not give in to Maud. Finally Maud had said, 'You can play with your old dolls by yourself,' and she had gone home.

Uncle Sandy, when his visit was over and he had to go home, said, 'I leave you to the joys of gas, Mother.'

CHAPTER V

PUTTING IN THE LIGHTS

A WEEK later, on Mrs. Morse's birthday, she had a letter from her son. Joan brought it up to her grandmother who had just finished her breakfast.

'Here's a letter from Uncle Sandy,' she said.
'He never forgets my birthday,' said Mrs. Morse. 'He can't be bothered getting me a present, so he always sends me a check. Once it was as big as fifty dollars, although he knows that I do not need his money any more than a toad needs a pocket. For mercy's sake!' she added. The check fell out of her hand and dropped to the floor. Joan picked it up and handed it to her.

'Listen to this,' said her grandmother. 'My dear Mother: I am sending you for your birthday present the money for electric lights, with all the extra frills, such as lamps, vacuum cleaner, electric iron, and toaster. I could not think of the possibility of Betsy being driven crazy by the dim light, after all these years,

and I hope you will see that a doll house is provided for her with an electric switch in it.'

'He has won out,' said Mrs. Morse. 'He has always got the better of me, ever since he was a small boy.'

'Grandmother, will you really get a doll house for Betsy?' said Joan, 'with an electric light in it that I can make come and go?'

'I will certainly get a doll house. I am not sure about the electric light. I think the house lights will have to do for Betsy.'

Mrs. Morse decided to stay at home that summer and rent her cottage at Nahant. She did not like to be away when the men were working about the house. She knew they would make some mistake unless she were on the spot. If Joan needed a change she could send her away for a time.

'I have had things done to the house before,' said Mrs. Morse, 'and although they say everything will be finished by the first of August, I know it will be at least September before they get through.'

Joan had been seeing a great deal, not only of Maud Saunders, but of Laura Marsh and Tony, and dear Harriet Lane, who was nearly grown up, and her brother, Asa, who was about

Tony's age. It was sad to think that, one after another of these children would flit away as the weather grew warmer. The Marshes were the first to go. They closed their house as soon as school was over, and went to their cottage by the sea. Harriet and Asa were still at home, and so was Maud. Joan liked her the least of all the children.

'Maud is so quarrelsome,' she said to her grandmother.

'Did you ever hear that it took two to make a quarrel?' Mrs. Morse asked.

'Yes,' said Joan. 'If she'd only stop, there wouldn't be any quarrel.'

'And what would happen if you were to stop?'

'I don't quarrel with the other children — at least hardly ever.'

'I suspect it is because the other children let you have your own way. How would it do to let Maud have her own way half the time? If she wants to play ball when you want to play dolls, why not play ball? It is a good game, and it keeps you out of doors.'

Joan thought for a moment. 'I think Maud likes to quarrel,' she said at last. 'I think that's why she likes me, because she can't boss me as she can the other children.'

Her grandmother looked thoughtful. 'Possibly, but all the same, you might let her have her way sometimes.'

'I do, lots of times, Grandmother. Lots of times we are just as peaceful as we can be. Sometimes you and Uncle Sandy quarrel,' she added.

'Sandy and I? We never quarrel. We never have. Sometimes we disagree, and we both like a discussion.'

'Maud and I like a discussion,' said Joan.

The Lanes did not close their house. This made it pleasant for Mrs. Morse, for Miss Hattie Lane, the aunt of Harriet and Asa, came over almost every day to see her. But the children went away for a long visit. They were going to the seashore to stay with Tony and Laura. Joan wished she had been asked to go there too. It was getting hotter and hotter. The very trees in the back yard seemed baked. She had Maud to play with, for the Saunders' house was to be kept open, but Maud was soon to go to make her Aunt Joanna a long visit at the farm.

'I wish you were going, too,' Maud said, one afternoon.

'I guess you'll be glad to get away from me,'

said Joan. 'I guess it will be a nice change to do just as you please.'

They had been having one of their discussions.

'I can't do as I please on the farm,' said Maud. 'Aunt Joanna is lovely, but I always have to do just as she likes. Mother says I always come home not quite such a little heathen. She says I have nice manners when I come home in the fall.'

So Maud went at last, and there was no child for Joan to play with. But the kittens were next best, and the men at last came to start putting in the electric lights, and this was very exciting, for there was something going on every day. They bored a great many holes, and they played an interesting game of hide-and-seek, one man calling to the other to know where he was, so that the holes could be in the right places. There were bits of shiny cable to play with. Sometimes Joan made-believe they were sticks of candy. All sorts of strange things happened when the men were putting in the lights. There were holes in such queer places. The men put a board over one place, like a bridge, and Joan kept walking back and forth on it, because it was such fun.

‘Look out, little lady,’ said one of the men, ‘you may get a bad fall.’

Joan liked all the men, but this one she liked best. She used to go into the room where they were working and begin to talk. Her first question always was, ‘Have you any children?’ Two of the men were not married. But this man, who was older, had four children, a nice family, two boys and two girls. Joan knew all their names.

‘I suppose your children have lots and lots of bits of cable to play with,’ said she.

‘Joan,’ called her grandmother, ‘come downstairs. You mustn’t bother the men.’

This was what always happened just as the talk began to grow interesting. Another day there was a great time in the kitchen. The cook had merely gone out to empty some ashes, and when she came back the men had all the cups and saucers and plates out of her cupboard, and they were making a place in the cupboard for the cable. Joan thought it a good time to go on with the talk that had been interrupted the day before.

‘Do your little girls like to play with dolls?’ she asked Mr. Smith.

‘Pauline don’t; she’s a bit too grown up, but Betty does.’

‘Joan, your grandmother wants you to come upstairs,’ said Delia.

The kittens disliked having the men around even more than the cook did. They had to be taken from one room to another, so as to be shut in where there was no work going on. They were not allowed to go out of doors for fear they would get lost or be badly injured by some animal.

‘They had a sad life, poor darlings, losing their mother,’ said Joan.

One morning the kittens were nowhere to be found. The cook had left them overnight in the kitchen. When they were not there, she thought the housemaid had put them somewhere for safety. The housemaid thought Joan had them. It was Joan who was the first to be worried.

‘Where are Tommy and Tilly?’ she asked.

No one knew where they were.

‘They must have got out of doors somehow,’ said Nora. ‘The men are always leaving some place open.’

‘Got out!’ cried Joan. ‘Then they’ll never come back. Some dog will kill them, or they’ll get lost. Oh, my darling Tilly! She is so little and thin. Some dog will get her. Tommy can look out for himself, but Tilly!’

They went from room to room and looked in every closet. Tommy and Tilly were nowhere to be found.

'The men were working at the top of the house yesterday,' said Mrs. Morse. 'Do you suppose the skylight was left open?'

Joan rushed to one of the windows and looked out. To her horror she saw Tilly on the very top of the roof. Tommy was scrambling up the roof to join her. Joan opened the door and went out on the balcony.

'Tommy, Tilly,' she cried. She started to climb up the roof herself, but Delia was behind her pulling at her skirts.

'Come back,' she cried. 'It isn't safe.'

'Tilly, Tommy,' they both called.

Delia had a saucer of milk in her hand. She put it down on the balcony floor. After a time Tommy came down and began to lap it. And presently, to Joan's great delight, Tilly scrambled down and joined him. A little later Joan sat in her grandmother's room with the two kittens in her lap.

'The darling things,' she said. 'Did you ever see such darlings, Grandmother? Tommy is licking my hand. And how he purrs! He purrs much louder than Tilly. She is such a little

lady, even to her purr. It is funny about twins. Tony Marsh is a lot gentler than Laura. Isn't that funny, Grandmother? You'd think Laura would be quiet and Tony noisy. Wouldn't it have been terrible if they had been lost?"

"I suppose so," said her grandmother.

"You suppose so!" said Joan. "But, Grandmother, think how lonesome the house would be. I would rather have gas all my life long and its smell and its smoke and have Tilly and Tommy than to lose them just because of electric lights."

"If I'd known how much confusion it was to make, and how much dirt, I never should have had the courage to have electric lights put in," said Mrs. Morse.

The pounding was beginning and Joan dropped the kittens and slipped out of her seat.

"Joan, where are you going?" asked her grandmother.

"I am going to talk to Mr. Smith. It is his last day. He says the men can get on all right without him after to-day."

"Joan, stay just where you are. Mr. Smith does not want to be kept back in his work by

having a troublesome child asking him questions.'

'But, Grandmother, it is my last chance. He's on another job. He's only going to stay a few minutes this morning. I've got to tell him how much I'll miss him, I've got to know whether Pauline's mother is going to let her bob her hair. It is all so important. I've got to know what Betty had for her birthday presents. Just think, Grandmother, she is six. She was to have a cake with six candles. Oh, please, Grandmother, please, please, let me go.'

'Well, I suppose you'll have to go,' said Mrs. Morse. 'Tell Mr. Smith I hope you haven't been too troublesome. And, Joan, perhaps there is something among your playthings that you can send as a birthday present to Mr. Smith's little girl.'

'I did give her something; I gave her some of my tea set.'

'You gave her part of that pretty tea set you brought all the way from California?'

'Well, you see,' said Joan, 'I couldn't give her anything that belonged to you, and I couldn't give her any of my poor things, so the tea set was about all I had I could give. I only gave her a cup and saucer. I could spare that

much. Mr. Smith didn't want to take them without telling you, but I told him they were my own. You see, Grandmother, it is such a great thing to be six. It never happens again. I can remember how big I felt when I was six.'

'I suppose now that you are seven, it seems a long time ago.'

'Ages and ages ago,' said Joan. 'So much has happened since. I've made so many new friends. What should I do without you and Nora and Tony and Laura and Harriet and Asa and Maud, and Tommy and Tilly?'

'You mention the kittens last,' said her grandmother.

'Somebody has to be mentioned last,' said Joan. 'But I love them just as much as if I put them first.'

CHAPTER VI

THE INVITATION

AUGUST had come, and although Mr. Smith was on another job, the men were still working on the electric lights. It was very hot, the hottest August that Joan's grandmother could remember. The grass on the lawn looked parched, and it took a great deal of watering to keep the shrubs and flowers in good condition. Poor Joan minded the heat very much, for in California she had always had the sea in summer. She began to look very pale. She had the kittens to play with, and Betsy; but, now that she had had children to play with, it was harder than ever to be without them.

'I do wish,' she said to the looking-glass child, 'that I could go to some nice cool place where I could be out of doors all the time.'

'I can never be out of doors at all,' said Christabel, in her high, squeaky voice. 'I have to stay all day long, winter or summer, in this old room.'

'Well, anyway,' said Joan, 'you've got a pretty, white muslin dress now.'

‘What good is a white muslin dress, if I always have to live in this room?’ said the looking-glass child.

‘You ought to be very grateful that you are not sick,’ said Joan, who was repeating a remark of her grandmother’s.

‘Well, I am not grateful,’ said Christabel, ‘and neither would you be if you had to live in this old mirror.’

Just then Joan heard the double ring of the postman, and she ran downstairs to get the mail and bring it up to her grandmother, who was having her afternoon rest in her bedroom. Joan was always greatly interested in the mail, although there was almost never anything in it for her. Still, there always might be, for twice she had had a letter from Uncle Sandy, and three times letters had come from one or another of her friends in California, and once there had been a letter from Miss Joanna Saunders. She was expecting to hear from Maud any day now, for she had promised to write to her.

There was only one letter, and this was for her grandmother. It was a fat letter in a big envelope. She looked at the handwriting. Oh, joy! It was a big, sprawly handwriting, like

Miss Joanna's. She looked at the postmark. It was that of Miss Joanna's town. It must be a letter from Miss Joanna. There could not be two people in the same town with a sprawly handwriting like that. She wondered if her grandmother was asleep, and she opened the door very gently and peeped in. She was still lying on the sofa, but she was wide awake, for she was reading a book. She looked at Joan with a bright smile.

'My little comfort,' she said, 'what should I do without you?'

Joan felt so happy when her grandmother said this kind of thing that something seemed to happen that sent a pleasant glow all down her back.

'Here's a letter for you, Grandmother. I think it is from Miss Joanna Saunders.'

Her grandmother laid down her book and adjusted her spectacles. Why were old people always so slow? Then Mrs. Morse took a slender silver paper-cutter that was in her book for a mark, and she cut the envelope. Joan would have torn it open and had the letter read by this time. There were three letters inside the envelope; the letter for Mrs. Morse, and one for Joan, and a very small one for Betsy. Joan

was near enough to catch sight of Betsy's name on a tiny envelope. Mrs. Morse was carefully reading her own letter.

'Please give me my letters,' begged Joan.

'There is only one for you, the other one is for Betsy.'

'I have to read all her letters to her,' said Joan. 'She has trouble with her eyes. I hope they will improve when the electric lights are in.'

'I hope so,' said Mrs. Morse. She did not seem in any hurry to give Joan the letters.

'This letter from Miss Saunders gives me a good deal to think about,' said Mrs. Morse. 'She has asked you to come and make her a visit if I can spare you, and if I can get you to her.'

'Oh, Grandmother!' said Joan with shining eyes. 'You can put me in the care of the conductor. He wouldn't lose me.'

'No, I would never do that. One of the maids can take you. I am just a little puzzled as to how to manage it, for go you must and shall; the change will do you a world of good.'

Joan began dancing around the room. It was pleasant to be a little comfort to her grand-

mother, but it was still pleasanter to make Miss Joanna and Maud a visit.

‘I suppose Grandmother can spare me,’ she thought, ‘for she never had me until last March.’ She began to count the time on her fingers, from the end of March to the end of April, one month; to the end of May, two; June, three; July, four; it wasn’t quite five months since she had been with her grandmother, who had lived seventy-five years without her. Surely, she could be spared for a visit.

‘What does she say?’ Joan asked.

““My dear Mrs. Morse,”” her grandmother read aloud. ““I do hope you will trust with me your most valuable possession, little Joan. I know it is asking a great deal to beg to borrow her for a few weeks’ visit. You and I are not quite strangers, for we met once, and you knew my brother. Maud longs for Joan, and we hear that it is a hot August in your part of the world. Could you not let one of the maids bring her to us and stay long enough to see a little of the country? My sister-in-law will be coming here in September for a short visit, and Joan can go back with her.

““I should be only too delighted if you could

come here with Joan yourself, but I fear you will feel you cannot leave on account of the workmen in your house."

'I think I'll let Nora go,' said Mrs. Morse. 'Anna can do the cooking for three or four days. And Nora was brought up on a farm and is devoted to animals.'

Joan was delighted, for she was fonder of Nora than of either of the other maids. She was the youngest of them, and the one who took the care of Tommy and Tilly.

'I wish they could go, too, poor darlings,' said Joan to Nora.

'They were not invited,' said Nora. 'And, anyway, they wouldn't like the journey.'

'It will be just fun for us, won't it, Nora? I love to travel, don't you? I like anything that goes, and the faster it goes the better I like it; and trains always go fast.'

'I shall miss you, my darling,' Mrs. Morse said, as she bade Joan good-bye. 'What shall I do without my little girl?'

'I wish you were coming, too,' said Joan, as she kissed her grandmother. 'I am sure the men could get the lights in all right without you. But I'll write to you, Grandmother, and tell you about all the different animals,' and

she flung her arms once more around her grandmother's neck.

Joan waved a good-bye as she and Nora went out of the gate. 'Nora, do you suppose they will have a pig at the farm?' she asked. 'I like pigs, especially the little ones. There was one in California that had a lot of children. Why do pigs have so many more children than cats have, Nora?'

'If I could answer questions like that I should not be going to the mountains with you, but in some very important position.'

This was Nora's usual remark, and Joan was getting tired of it.

When they reached the station in the mountains, after a six hours' journey, Miss Joanna and Maud were waiting for them in Miss Joanna's automobile. She was driving the car herself, and Maud was on the front seat by her side. She hastily scrambled down when she saw Joan and Nora get off the train. Joan was carrying Betsy, and Nora had a baggage check in her hand.

Maud sat on the back seat, between Joan and Nora, as they sped away from the station. She told Joan what all the buildings were, as they went swiftly through the village.

'That brick church, with the white trimmings and the clock on the tower, is the one we go to. They have Sunday School, and they had a church supper the other night. I went, and I had three kinds of pie and four sorts of cake. Aunt Joanna was busy selling things at a table, so she didn't know how much I ate.'

'Goodness!' said Joan. 'Weren't you sick the next day?'

'Not at all,' said Maud. 'I had a funny pain, but I wasn't at all sick. The pain was horrid, but I was all right the day after. That's the Post Office,' and she pointed to a dingy building that needed a coat of paint.

Joan looked at it with deep interest. This was the building where the wonderful letter had been mailed that had made such a change in her life.

The farmhouse where Miss Joanna lived was at the top of a high hill with a fine view of hills and mountains. It was a red farmhouse with a large red barn not far away. Joan could hardly wait to explore the treasures of the barn and make the acquaintance of all the animals. She sniffed the clear mountain air and drew a long breath. The heat of the suburb seemed far away. It was still August, but what

a different August from the August she had known that morning! She thought of her grandmother left behind in the stuffy house. 'I wish air could be mailed like letters,' she said. 'I'd send Grandmother a big box of this air by parcel post.'

Joan longed to see the animals, but it was almost supper time when they reached Miss Joanna's house, and Nora said that a little girl who had sat by an open window for six hours in a smoky train must have her face and hands thoroughly scrubbed before supper, and her frock changed. This seemed a great pity, but there was no help for it. So Joan began to examine her room with interest. It was a small room which connected with Miss Joanna's room. There was only one window, but this was a large one with a window seat.

'Oh, what a pretty room!' she said to Nora. And she went over to the window. 'I can see hills and a big mountain behind them. And oh, Nora, what a beautiful tree. What kind is it? It has such pretty leaves.'

She expected to hear Nora say, 'If I could answer questions like that I should be in the Forestry Department,' as she had once said when she had asked her about a rare shrub in

the Arboretum at Jamaica Plain. But instead of that, Nora said, 'It is a maple, the kind of maple that gives sap from which you can get maple syrup in the spring. In the autumn it will be covered with glorious leaves, bright red, or else yellow.'

Joan was very much surprised to find how dark it was growing when supper was over. 'Why is it so dark here after supper and so light in Boston?' she asked.

'Because we have Standard Time here, and you have Daylight-Saving Time in Massachusetts,' said Miss Joanna. 'You pretend there that it is eight o'clock when the sun says it is seven so as to give people a chance to work in their gardens, and do other pleasant things after supper.'

'I see,' said Joan. 'If we were in Massachusetts we could go to see all the animals, but I suppose it is too dark.'

'I'll show you an animal,' said Miss Joanna. She went off to another part of the house, and presently she came back, and as she opened the door a large collie dog came in with her. He was a beautiful shade of brown, and he had such friendly eyes that Joan gave him a loving pat.

‘You are a perfect dear,’ she said. ‘Come over by me, Colin.’

‘How did you know his name?’ asked Maud.

‘You told me one time when you were talking about the farm. I never forget anybody’s name.’

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE BREAKFAST

THE next morning Joan waked up very early and without waiting for Nora she got up and dressed. It was so light she was sure it was time to get up. It was too sunshiny a morning to stay in her room, and the leaves on the maple trees looked so pretty as the pale sunlight flickered through them. The birds were still singing. They seemed to say, 'Come out, Joan Morse.' One was a delightful bird. It knew her name quite well. Yes, she could really make it say, 'Come out, Joan Morse,' without so very much pretending. There was another bird singing that seemed to say, 'You witch, you witch, you witch.'

She went softly out of her room so as not to wake dear Miss Joanna in the next room, and along the hall to Maud's room. Perhaps Maud would be awake, and they could visit the animals in the barn together. But Maud was fast asleep. Should she wake her up? She stood hesitating on the threshold. Perhaps she

would wake up of herself? But she did not wake up; she was sleeping very peacefully. Finally the temptation was too great. Joan went over to the bed and gave her a gentle shake.

‘Wake up,’ she said. ‘It is a lovely day, and I can’t wait to see the animals.’

At last Maud opened her eyes.

‘It’s Joan,’ said the little girl. ‘I’m just crazy to see the animals. I can’t wait any longer.’

‘What time is it?’ asked sleepy Maud.

‘It’s most six,’ said Joan, looking at the clock on the mantelpiece. She was surprised to find that it was so early.

‘Oh, go away!’ said Maud crossly. ‘I don’t have to get up until most half-past seven — that’s breakfast time. I can dress quick as a wink.’

‘But I’m crazy to have you show me the animals,’ Joan said.

‘Oh, go away!’ Maud repeated. ‘It isn’t likely any of the animals won’t live until after breakfast.’

This made Joan laugh. ‘I suppose I shall live myself until after breakfast,’ she said to herself as she went back to her room, ‘but it

almost seems, yes, it truly almost seems as if I should die if I didn't see those animals. Yes, it truly does seem as if I should have some kind of sickness if I didn't see those animals right away.'

She went downstairs, and as she passed the tall clock in the entry, she saw to her surprise that it was only twenty minutes before six. Some one had called it a grandfather clock the night before, and she had forgotten to ask why, but now she wondered if it had belonged to Miss Joanna's grandfather, or if it was called a grandfather clock because it was so tall and stood so straight and looked so important. This clock was more likely to be right than Maud's clock. She tried the front door, but it was locked, and the key was not in it.

'There are other doors to this house besides the front door,' she said, 'and perhaps they have forgotten to lock them all.'

She wandered around the house, feeling like a burglar as she tried the doors. At last she came to a passageway that she was sure led to the kitchen. 'Cooks always get up early,' she said to herself; 'perhaps — oh, I forgot, Miss Joanna hasn't any cook, but just the farmer's wife.' She paused with her hand on what she

was sure was the kitchen door. She knew nothing of the habits of farmers' wives — perhaps they didn't get up so early as cooks. This one had looked very pleasant as she brought in the supper the night before. Miss Joanna had introduced her as Mrs. Jones, and Joan had thought to herself how odd it was that there should be a Miss Joanna and a Joan and a Mrs. Jones all in the same house. She opened the door and the collie bounded out.

'Some one is glad to see me,' she thought.

She heard footsteps on the back stairs. Oh, joy! It was Mrs. Jones coming down to the kitchen.

'Good-morning, Mrs. Jones,' she said.

'Good-morning, Joan,' said the farmer's wife.

'Do you have any children?' Joan asked.

'Not any. We are just young married people.'

'If you ever should have a little girl,' Joan continued, 'you couldn't call her Joan, could you? Joan Jones would sound so queer. I'm glad my name isn't Jones. What is your other name, Mrs. Jones? I always like to know people's first names.'

'My name is Martha, and they call me Patty,' said Mrs. Jones.

‘Why do they call you Patty? I should think they would call you Matty. It sounds more like Martha.’

‘Bless me if I can tell you why they called me Patty. I suppose it was because there were other Marthas in the family, and Matties, too. Martha was my grandmother’s name.’

‘Joan was my great-grandmother’s name.’

Joan had such an interesting talk with Mrs. Jones that it was some time before she remembered about the animals. At last she said, ‘Do you think Mr. Jones would show me the animals in the barn? Could I see him milk the cow?’

‘My husband has got through milking long ago,’ said Mrs. Jones. ‘But I know he’ll be glad to show you the animals.’

Mrs. Jones, with Joan following her, went out of the kitchen door, and they found Mr. Jones weeding in the vegetable garden.

‘Little Joan Morse wants to see the animals,’ said Mrs. Jones. ‘This is my husband, Peter Jones.’

‘Pleased to meet you,’ said Peter Jones.

He was a young man with a pleasant smile and friendly blue eyes. He had a sunburned face and looked as if he lived out of doors.

‘This little lady is up bright and early,’ said Mrs. Jones.

‘I waked up a lot earlier than I do in Massachusetts,’ Joan confided to Peter, ‘and I just couldn’t wait until after breakfast to see the animals. Maud was to have shown them to me, but she wouldn’t get up.’

‘What animals do you have to your home in Massachusetts?’ Peter Jones asked.

‘We only have two kittens. We didn’t have anything until I came. I had to have some animals, and Grandmother said I could have a kitten if I found it in the bushes, and I found two kittens — twins. Their names are Tilly and Tommy.’

Her new friend was so interested that she told him the whole history of the kittens, including their escape when the electric-light men were working around the house.

‘I should think you ought to have more animals than two kittens, and you so fond of pets,’ said Peter Jones. ‘Can’t you have a cow and a few hens and chickens?’

‘Grandmother lives too near the city. She has only a small yard. She has no barn. There wouldn’t be room for a cow, I’m afraid. I did speak of a hen and chickens, but she says the

neighbors are so near they'd mind the cock's crowing. Now, I think the cock's crowing is the loveliest sound — don't you, Mr. Jones?’

‘Oh, call me Peter,’ said the young man. ‘Everybody does 'round here.’

‘Peter, don't you think roosters sound like very nice music when they crow?’

‘I've heard better music,’ said Peter. ‘But roosters are all right. We have a plenty, if that's the music you like.’

They had reached the barn and Peter pushed back the heavy door. He went across to the other end and pushed back that door, too. ‘There's a nice view out there,’ he said. ‘Folks mostly like the view.’

Joan was delighted with the view. She liked the fragrant smell of hay and the wide view of hills and mountains that she could see through the door. Presently Peter showed her two cows in stalls side by side. They were brown and they had soft, friendly eyes.

‘Oh! How pretty they are! What are their names?’ she asked.

‘This one is Pansy. We named her because she gave so many pans of milk,’ said he. ‘She is the mother of the other cow. Her name is Mignonette. Miss Joanna named her because

it is French for a little darling. She was that when she was first born. We call her Minnie for short.'

'She's as big as her mother now,' said Joan. 'Do you have any horses?'

'Just two for farm work mostly. Miss Joanna is keen on her car, now she's got it.'

'Oh, but they are lovely things!' said Joan, as she looked at the well-groomed brown horses.

'Oh, Mr. Jones — I mean, Peter — can you show me the pig and her children? Miss Joanna told me the pig had a lot of little children, very young and small. I do like small pigs, the very little ones, don't you, Peter?'

'Well, to tell you the truth, I prefer horses and collie dogs,' said Peter.

'Oh, of course, horses are more useful, and collie dogs are nicer for the house. But I just love little baby pigs,' said Joan.

They went to the pig sty, and Joan was enchanted with the little pigs. There were six of them and Joan asked their names.

'They haven't any names,' said Peter.

'No names, poor darlings!' said Joan.

'You can name them if you like,' said Peter.

So Joan had the fun of naming them all.



SEEING THE ANIMALS

‘But I shall never know them apart, I am afraid,’ she said. ‘You’ll have to help me remember which is which.’

Last of all Joan saw the hens and chickens. They were very lovely to look at, for they were white leghorns, and their combs were so red that they made a good contrast.

‘They are the prettiest hens I have ever seen, and the chickens are too sweet for anything. Do they all have names?’

‘It is altogether too much trouble to name them,’ said Peter, ‘and they all look very much alike. There’s one my wife calls Madam Henn, for she has a grand air about her and is an old-timer. When she lays an egg she makes as much fuss about it as if it were the fust time she ever done the job.’

Joan looked with interest at Madam Henn, who was daintily eating the corn that Peter scattered about.

‘There’s the breakfast gong,’ said Peter. And Joan felt as if she had come into a new world, for she had never seen such a wonderful farm before.

CHAPTER VIII

A PICNIC ON MOUNT SURPRISE

SEPTEMBER had come, and with it a number of guests. Miss Joanna had planned to have Mrs. Saunders and her son Eliot at one time, and Bertha Saunders and her friend, Harriet Lane, at another. But it was more convenient for them all to come at once, so the farmhouse was packed with people. It was the time to make crabapple jelly and mint jelly, and to make pickles and to can vegetables, and so Miss Joanna planned a picnic for almost every day so that her visitors would be away at dinner time. There had been three of these picnics already, each more delightful than the last. To-day they were to go to Mount Surprise. The automobile was at a garage for repairs, so Peter was to drive them there. They started soon after breakfast and every one was in good spirits, except Maud, who was always fussing over things, if she did not get what she wanted.

‘Joan, you can sit on the front seat, between me and Peter,’ said Eliot. He was a big boy of twelve and he had taken a liking to Joan be-

cause she was so pleased with everything, instead of finding fault, like his little sister.

‘I want to sit on the front seat between you and Peter. I like the front seat much the best,’ said Maud.

‘You do as I tell you,’ said Eliot. ‘Joan is a visitor.’

Maud rudely pushed past Joan and was about to scramble up to the seat when her brother put her back. Mrs. Saunders was settling herself comfortably in the middle seat.

‘Maud,’ she said, ‘what a fuss you do make over nothing! What difference does it make where you sit?’

‘You said you liked the middle seat better than the back one, Mother,’ said Maud.

Joan hung back, and Miss Joanna said, ‘I am going to sit on the middle seat, and Harriet, Bertha, and Maud can all sit together on the back seat, and Joan in front.’

‘I never knew such quarrelsome, disagreeable children as my two youngest,’ said Mrs. Saunders. ‘Bertha was such a quiet little thing.’

They were off at last, and Joan had the bliss of sitting on the front seat and watching the horses. She had grown very fond of them, and

she sometimes went to the barn to give them each a lump of sugar. Automobiles were all right if you could not get anything better, but they could not compare with two brown horses, full of life and with long, beautiful tails. Peter let her put her hands on the reins, back of where he held his hand, so that she could pretend she was driving. Maud was soon absorbed in a game they were playing on the back seat. They drove to the top of Mount Surprise, where there was a fine view of Mount Washington behind the other mountains.

After lunch they played games, and then Miss Joanna made Joan and Maud lie down and take a rest while she read to them some stories about animals.

The walk back to the main road, through the woods, was the most beautiful walk Joan had ever taken. The trees were so tall and so thick that one could only see small patches of blue sky between them. It was a steep path, but Eliot held fast to one of her hands, and Maud skipped on ahead of them. Sometimes they came to a wet place they had to skirt around, and once they had to climb over a fallen tree trunk, and it was all most exciting.

'I never would have come this way if I had known what I was getting into,' panted Mrs. Saunders. 'Joanna, you ought to have warned me. You said it was a good path.'

'It used to be. I haven't been over it for some years.'

'You said it was a good path,' Mrs. Saunders repeated with irritation, a little later, as she paused before the fallen tree. 'Eliot,' she called, 'come and help me over this tree. There he goes, skipping over things with that child, as care-free as if he had no mother. Eliot,' she called again. 'It does seem strange that I should have such disobedient children when I was such a good child myself.'

'Perhaps he doesn't hear you.'

'Hear me! The little rascal! He has ears like a lynx.'

'I can help you over better than he. Give me your hand,' said Miss Joanna.

Meanwhile Bertha succeeded in capturing her brother and giving him the lunch baskets to carry. 'The man of the party should always carry things,' she said firmly.

'I thought you said this was a short cut,' Mrs. Saunders said, when they were halfway down through the woods.

‘I thought it was. It is some years since I was here.’

‘It will be some years before you catch me here again,’ said Mrs. Saunders.

Peter was waiting for them at the foot of the mountain in the automobile, which he had found ready for service at the repair shop. It was only a small car, and they could not all ride comfortably in it. But Miss Joanna said she would walk, and that Eliot could come with her. Harriet and Bertha said they would rather walk, but it was too far for the little girls, so they had to ride back with Peter and Mrs. Saunders.

‘You can give the baskets to Mrs. Jones,’ said Miss Joanna. ‘She will take care of what food is left.’

Mrs. Saunders went up to her room the minute she got to the farm. ‘If I had had any idea what a scramble that walk was to be, I never would have taken it,’ she said more than once. The little girls sat down on a seat near the barn to examine the baskets.

‘Maybe there’s something left in them that is good,’ said Maud. ‘I’m hungry. Oh, bother! there’s nothing but empty thermos bottles in my basket.’

‘Here are some bread and butter sandwiches,’ said Joan, diving into her basket.

‘Can’t you find anything better than that?’ said Maud. ‘I’m not hungry for bread and butter. How about peanut-butter sandwiches?’

‘There aren’t any of those.’

‘Can’t you find any cookies, Joan?’

‘Not a single cooky.’

‘What a shame! I only had six.’

‘And I only had five,’ said Joan regretfully. ‘But here’s one blueberry cake.’ They divided it as evenly as they could, and they found two pieces of cake that were at the bottom of the basket. It was a kind they liked, with a frosting.

‘I don’t suppose Aunt Joanna meant us to eat what’s left over,’ said Joan, as she munched her piece of cake. ‘She said, “Give the baskets to Mrs. Jones.”’

‘She won’t care, and she isn’t your Aunt Joanna. You must call her Miss Joanna.’

‘She said I could call her Aunt Joanna.’

‘Well, she isn’t your Aunt Joanna, so it’s a lie. She is Miss Joanna to you.’

‘I shall call her what I like,’ said Joan with dignity.

Maud was silent. She had found it of no use to dispute with Joan when she was decided.

‘Here’s a hard-boiled egg,’ said Joan.

‘I’m not hungry for hard-boiled eggs,’ said Maud.

‘I’ll tell you what we’ll do,’ said Maud, ‘we’ll put the hard-boiled egg in Madam Henn’s nest. What fun it will be to hear Mrs. Jones scold when she opens it.’

‘Perhaps it will be Aunt Joanna,’ said Joan. ‘Perhaps she’ll be making a sponge cake, and she’ll open the egg, and she’ll say, “Goodness, Madam Henn has laid a hard-boiled egg. How is it possible?”’

‘She’ll say, “Those naughty children, what will they be up to next?”’ said Maud.

The children put the egg in Madam Henn’s nest. The next day they came to Miss Joanna with some fresh-laid eggs and the hard-boiled one.

‘Oh, I’m glad to have the eggs,’ said Aunt Joanna. ‘I think I’ll make a sponge cake.’

The little girls looked at each other and smiled. Aunt Joanna took four eggs, but she did not touch the hard-boiled one. They could hardly wait, they were so impatient.

‘Wouldn’t it be richer with five eggs?’ said

Maud. 'We found such a nice big egg in Madam Henn's nest. Look at it.'

'That will be a very nice one to boil for your breakfast to-morrow morning, Maud,' said Aunt Joanna. 'I'll put it aside so you'll be sure to have it.'

Again the little girls looked at each other. Could Aunt Joanna suspect the truth? But how? Afterwards they talked this over. Whatever the truth of the matter might be, Maud had the hard-boiled egg for her breakfast the next morning. The eggs all came in, as they did every morning, in a silver dish with six divisions and a silver egg cup in each one. As there were seven people one egg had to be put in a separate cup. This morning it was Maud's. Maud and Joan had grown expert in taking off the top of their eggshells.

'Mine is hard-boiled,' said Maud. 'I hate hard-boiled eggs.'

'It is the very egg that you found in Madam Henn's nest yesterday,' said her aunt. 'I saved it for you. Of course you don't know how it got there, but I found these verses last night. They seem to be from Madam Henn, and they explain matters.'

THE HARD-BOILED EGG

Said Madam Henn to Mrs. Henn, 'I've laid a hard-boiled egg.'

Said Mrs. Henn, 'It cannot be. Tell me the truth, I beg.'

'It is the truth,' said Madam Henn, 'the rooster told me so.'

He said, "You've laid a hard-boiled egg," and he began to crow.'

Then all the hens gathered around
And said, 'Cut, cut-ker-darket.
Give us the rule, we'll lay such eggs,
And send them all to market.'

Said Madam Henn, 'Seek a hot day,
Sit in the broiling sun,
And if you are not boiled yourself,
The trick is easily done.'

Said Mrs. Henn to Madam Henn,
'Perhaps I am a fool.
But I prefer my old-time eggs,
Laid in a place that's cool.'

'I like my good old-fashioned nest
That's in the homey barn.
And, after all,' said Mrs. Henn,
'Your tale may be a yarn.'

CHAPTER IX

THE ICE-STORM

WHEN Joan came home the last of September with Mrs. Saunders and Maud, she was very sorry to leave the people at the farm and the animals. But when she saw her dear grandmother waiting at the front door she flew into her arms.

‘My little comfort,’ said her grandmother. ‘I am glad to get you back. I have missed my little care-taker.’

Joan felt so important, to be called a little care-taker, that she had the warm feeling down her back that words of praise always gave her.

When Joan was taking off her hat and coat in her room and feeling homesick for the farm, she noticed how brown her face was.

‘You are as brown as an Indian,’ she said to the looking-glass child.

‘The same to you,’ she made Christabel reply, in her high, squeaky voice. ‘How did you get so brown?’

‘I played out of doors in the sun all day long

with Maud and Colin, the dog, and with the hens and chickens and pigs. And I had wonderful rides all over the country, and picnics. Oh, Christabel, I do miss it. But, Christabel, how did you get so brown, staying here all the time, in this room?"

"I heard your grandmother read one of your letters, and she said, "Joan will be as brown as an Indian when she gets home," and so I got hold of your paint-box and I painted myself a nice shade of brown so we should just match when you came home."

When she came downstairs her grandmother said, 'You'll miss the other children, and dear Miss Joanna. I wish she did not live in Chicago in the winter. But we'll have Maud over very often; and Laura and Tony are back now; and school will begin next Monday, and you'll like that. So cheer up. There is something I want to show you and Betsy in the other room.'

Joan went upstairs with her grandmother into a room that had been the sewing-room before she came, although it was seldom that there was a dressmaker sewing in it. She stood entranced at the door. There was a new paper on the walls, of a soft, pale green, and there was a low bookcase, with its upper shelf

no higher than Joan herself. The shelves were filled with books for children; many of them had colored pictures. There were some of her old favorites there, such as 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and Grimms' 'Fairy Tales.' And there was a book of natural history with pictures of different animals in it, and another book all about birds, with illustrations. This bookcase was what she saw first. But she soon discovered a house for Betsy and her other dolls, made like a real house, with a sloping, shingled roof, and two chimneys, and four windows on the front with glass in them, and green blinds. The front door was painted green, and it had a brass knob and a tiny brass knocker. The house was gray, of a shade that went well with the green door and blinds. And the chimney gave the touch of red that Joan liked. She stood transfixed with delight.

'Oh, Grandmother,' she said, 'does it open?'

Her grandmother showed her how the whole front was on hinges and could be swung back like a great door. There were four rooms inside — a parlor and a kitchen in the lower half, and two small bedrooms above, with a closet where the dolls' clothes could be kept, and some shelves above the bedrooms that were

filled with the tea set that Joan had brought from California.

'Oh, Grandmother,' she said again, 'what darling beds and bureaus! And what a dear stove in the kitchen, and what cunning saucepans! And there's a chandelier in the parlor! Is there a switch to turn on the lights?'

'No,' said her grandmother, 'it seemed a little better for Betsy to use the house lights. She might be careful herself in turning on the lights, but I should not have been sure of what your other dolls would do, and she has a good many callers.'

'Yes,' said Joan, 'Laura's Geraldine is a very well-behaved doll, but I am never sure what Maud's Adrianna will do next. She was sometimes very rude to Betsy on the farm. She told her she could not understand why she took a prize at the Doll Contest instead of herself. I think that Adrianna would have been switching those lights on and off all the time, whenever she came here.'

'That was what I was afraid of,' said Mrs. Morse.

Going to school was a great excitement to Joan. She had been taught at home in California, after she was too old for the kinder-

garten. She found herself very much ahead of the children of her age in some things, and behind them in other things. Laura and Maud, Tony and Asa, all went to the little school, as well as a number of other children. Joan was so happy with Laura and Maud that she did not feel the need of any new friends. One or the other of the little girls, and often both of them, came to play with her almost every afternoon, and once in a great while she went to one of their houses. But they liked to come to her better because there was more land around the house where they could play games, and on account of the wonderful doll house. So the autumn went by with its brilliant days and its rainy ones, and it seemed to Joan's grandmother as if she could see her little granddaughter's face grow happier with each passing week. It was early in the winter that the great ice-storm came. Joan, who had never seen snow before, had been delighted with every flurry of snow there had been. She was longing for the snow to get deep enough for the coasting of which she had heard so much. She hoped that the ponds would freeze over early and that her grandmother would let her learn to skate. This seemed a doubtful matter, how-

ever, for whenever she spoke of it her grandmother would say, 'You are very young to learn to skate, and it is violent exercise. You would be sure to get cooled off too soon and take cold. I never learned to skate when I was a child. My mother thought I was not strong enough.'

Joan was sure that if her grandmother had known the joys of skating, she would let her learn. All the other children knew how and they were longing for the cold weather to come. Joan hoped that when winter actually came her grandmother would relent.

During the first real snowstorm that Joan had ever seen, she sat with her face pressed close to the window pane.

'Grandmother, how beautiful it is!' she said. 'Nobody told me how beautiful it was. It is like some fairy thing, and there are such wonderful pictures on the window panes.'

'When I was a little girl we used to say that Jack Frost drew them.'

'Can I go out and play in the snow, Grandmother?'

'No, I think it wiser for you to stay in the house.'

Joan gave a little sigh. 'I saw Tony and Asa going by just now.'

‘I dare say, but they have not lived all their lives in California.’

‘I haven’t either,’ said Joan. ‘I’ve lived out of California ever since the last of March.’

‘I dare say Laura or Maud will come and play with you. If they don’t come pretty soon I’ll telephone for one of them.’

It was not long before the little girls were seen coming up the path through the snow. Their stocking caps were almost white with the snow, and their raincoats were thickly powdered with it. They were laughing as they ran up the path.

‘We’ve come for Joan to come out and help us make a path at Laura’s house,’ Maud said. ‘We’ve got an extra shovel at home for her.’

‘I don’t think it is a good day for Joan to go out. Can’t you children come in and play with her and the doll house?’

They shook their heads. What were dolls and their houses compared with out-of-door life on a day like this?

‘Oh, please, Grandmother,’ Joan begged. ‘I haven’t a speck of a cold.’

‘I don’t want you to get one. There is a warm fire here, and we’ll sit by it and I’ll read aloud anything you like.’

‘Oh, please let me go out,’ Joan begged.

‘Well,’ said her grandmother, ‘if Laura and Maud will bring their snow shovels over here and shovel out our path, I’ll let you go out for half an hour.’

‘But your path is shoveled out,’ said Maud. ‘Michael has made a grand path.’

‘After you have shoveled out your own path, you can come here. A good deal more snow will have fallen then, and it won’t do any harm to have it cleared away.’

The two little girls skipped off, arm in arm, dancing about in the snow. Presently Laura fell down and measured her length in it.

‘That is one thing I was afraid of,’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘It is turning into an ice-storm. You’ll have to be very careful or you’ll get a bad fall.’

‘I’ll be very careful,’ said Joan.

An hour later, when the children came back with the snow shovels and Joan helped them make a path, she thought she had never had so much fun in her life. Summer was very good fun, but there was surely nothing that compared with making a path in the snow for excitement. When her grandmother at last rapped on the window to call her in, her cheeks were rosy and her eyes dancing with happiness.

Later in the day the storm turned into a blizzard, and every one was glad to stay at home. Joan sat by the window and watched the flakes fall.

‘Grandmother, the fence looks as if it were made of marble,’ she said, ‘and the twigs are so shiny. If the sun came out it would glisten. Won’t it look pretty when the street lights are going?’

‘I’m afraid there will be no street lights for many a night,’ said her grandmother. ‘The storm, I fear, will have put them out of working order. Our house lights are not going.’

‘Not any of them?’

‘Michael tells me they are out in the cellar, and they are not going in the kitchen, so I am afraid they are none of them working.’

‘I’ll try them all,’ said Joan. She sprang up and went from room to room, trying the switches and pulling the chains. Not a light responded.

‘They aren’t any of them going,’ she said, ‘not a single one. What shall we do for light, Grandmother?’

‘What my grandmother did. I have saved the lamps in case of just such a time. But we have only a very little kerosene in the house.

I'll get some more Monday. The storm is too bad for the grocer to come out for a second trip to-day. I have plenty of candles; we'll all use those.'

Joan was delighted. She had never known anything like this storm before, and to go to bed by candlelight, like her great-great-grandmother, was an added delight. The wind was rising, and Mrs. Morse said, 'We shall be lucky if we get out of this storm without losing any of our trees. The weight of the ice on the branches will be sure to do some damage.'

That evening the house seemed very dark. There was only enough oil for a lamp in the kitchen and one in the dining-room, which Delia moved into the parlor when supper was over. The hall had a single candle burning in it. And when bedtime came, Joan and her grandmother, each of them, carried a candle as they went upstairs.

'Hold the candle very steady, Joan,' said her grandmother. 'I wouldn't let you carry it, only you are such a handy child.'

Joan wondered if her great-great-grandmother always carried a candle upstairs when she went to bed. That evening she had a long conversation with Betsy. Betsy could remember

things that had happened almost a hundred years ago. Joan had taken her up to her bedroom in the afternoon, for she wanted company. It seemed lonely not to be able to switch on the friendly electric light if one waked up in the night. Christabel was not so satisfactory as Betsy, for she could put Betsy in the chair by her bed.

‘I suppose, Betsy,’ said Joan, ‘that they didn’t even have any gas a hundred years ago.’

She made Betsy talk in a soft voice, very different from Christabel’s squeaky one.

‘No, there was no gas,’ said Betsy. ‘I haven’t a very good memory. I don’t remember when gas came in, but a hundred years ago, we had just candles and lamps.’

‘It is a wonder your eyes are as good as they are,’ said Joan.

‘They are not so very good,’ said Betsy, ‘but they have improved a great deal since we had the electric lights.’

‘People used to do a lot of fine work in old times,’ said Joan. ‘I’ve seen my great-great-grandmother’s sampler, Betsy. It is very pretty.’

‘Yes, she was a nice sewer — a much better sewer than you are,’ said Betsy.

‘Her name was Joan, like mine. It has the alphabet, all so nice, in green silk letters, and it says, “Idleness is the parent of want. Joan Craig, 1793.” She was only eight years old.’

‘I was always busy,’ said Betsy. ‘That’s why I’ve lived so long. I’ve seen dozens and dozens of ice-storms, a lot worse than this.’

The next day was Sunday, and the storm was over. Joan had never seen anything so beautiful as the glistening branches. It was like fairy-land, for every little twig shone like diamonds. A large branch of a tree had fallen and was lying in the middle of the front lawn. And many of the smaller trees were bent down in graceful lines by the weight of the snow. It was so slippery that Mrs. Morse said she did not want to go to church and that Joan had better not go to Sunday School. In vain the little girl teased, but her grandmother was firm.

‘See how the people slip about as they pass the house,’ she said. ‘I saw one strong man fall down, and there are very few out.’

‘But I can’t stay in all winter, Grandmother, because it is slippery,’ said Joan.

‘The men will have the sidewalks shoveled and properly sanded by to-morrow. We’ll have a church service just by our two selves.’

It was not so much the church service and the Sunday-School lesson that Joan minded missing as it was the chance to see the other children. The service with her grandmother before the fire in her room was pleasant, however, especially the singing of the hymns, for Joan liked to sing. Afterwards Tilly and Tommy were brought in, but they preferred the kitchen. It was a very long day. No one called, and Joan got tired of reading and of playing with Betsy. And it was too cold to sit in her room and talk to the looking-glass child. And, besides, she had lost her interest in Christabel, now that she had real children to play with.

‘I’ll tell you what we’ll do,’ her grandmother said, after she had had her afternoon nap, ‘we’ll frame your great-great-grandmother’s sampler, and then it can hang like a picture in the doll house, where it will show Betsy and the others what an industrious little girl made more than a hundred and twenty-five years ago. There are some old frames in a drawer in the closet in the entry that were too good to throw away. The pictures in them were not worth keeping. I think there is one that will fit the sampler.’

Joan was very eager now. She came in presently with two frames. The first was a little too large, but, oh, joy, the second just fitted, by turning in the bottom and the top a little.

‘I will take off the back of the frame,’ said Mrs. Morse, ‘and slip in the sampler between the wood and the glass, and we shall have a fine picture for the doll house. There is some silver picture cord in another of the drawers.’

When the sampler was framed, Joan hung it in the doll house and seated the dolls where they could read the inscription: ‘Idleness is the parent of want and of pain, but the labor of virtue bringeth forth pleasure.’

CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

IT was early in December when Mrs. Morse and Joan began to plan about Christmas presents.

‘We must go in and buy them some day very soon,’ said her grandmother, ‘for the shops get so crowded if we wait too long.’

‘How about this afternoon?’ said Joan.

‘It is too cold, and the morning would be a better time. You can come and sit by the fire and read to me in any book you like, while I sew.’

‘You choose the book, Grandmother.’

‘Very well. I’ll choose “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.”’

Joan thought it so fortunate that she and her grandmother liked the same books. They were sitting together cozily before the fire when there came a knock at the door.

‘Come in,’ said Mrs. Morse. And Harriet walked in. She was one of the people who had a right of way in the house.

‘I’ve come to ask if Joan can come in with us

and do Christmas shopping this afternoon,' said Harriet.

Joan's eyes shone. 'Oh, please, Grandmother, let me go,' she begged.

'It is a very cold afternoon,' said Mrs. Morse, 'and the mercury seems to be falling. What is the thermometer now?'

Harriet walked over to the window where there was an outside thermometer.

'It is eighteen,' she said, wishing she could make it higher.

'Yes, it is just as I thought, it has fallen two degrees since dinner.'

'Oh, please, Grandmother, let me go,' Joan begged.

'We are going in the automobile, and father is to drive himself. He came home to lunch. Asa and I are going, and I went over to ask Bertha. And Maud was crazy to go, too, and Asa wanted Tony, and so we asked Laura. And it did seem too bad for us all to go and not ask Joan when there would be room for us all.'

'The shops are very crowded in the afternoon,' said Mrs. Morse. 'I am so afraid of Joan picking up a cold.'

'I might pick up a cold here in the house, Grandmother, truly I might. Anna has one.'

‘The automobile is the closed one,’ said Harriet.

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Morse, ‘I suppose you’ll have to go. I can see it is a chance that won’t come again.’

Joan flew over to her grandmother and gave her a rapturous kiss.

‘You had better take the money Uncle Sandy gave you to buy Christmas presents with,’ she said, ‘and I’ll give you this dollar.’

‘We’ll come for her in about a quarter of an hour,’ said Harriet.

The automobile seemed stuffed full when it came. Asa and Maud were on the front seat with Mr. Lane. Bertha and Harriet were on the back seat, and Tony and Laura in the little seats. But there was room for Joan between Bertha and Harriet. The ride in itself was a pleasure. But when one thought of the joy of spending two whole dollars on Christmas presents, it seemed a most exciting prospect. Joan kept counting over on her fingers the people to whom she wanted to give presents. She had one already for Laura, and she was making one for Harriet. But she must get something for her grandmother, and then there was Uncle Sandy and dear Miss Joanna, and Peter

and Mrs. Jones, and Maud. And there were Delia and Nora at the house, and she must give something to Anna, too, or her feelings would be hurt. That made eight grown people, besides Maud. She wanted to give something very nice to her, and she did want to give something to Tony, she liked him so much. That would make ten. You could not get much for twenty cents. Perhaps she could give Anna a card. They stopped before a large department store, where one could buy almost anything one could think of, and Harriet took her by the arm.

‘There is such a crowd we had better keep together,’ she said. ‘We’ll wait here until Father comes. He’ll take charge of Tony and Asa.’

Bertha was looking out for Maud and Laura. They were going to separate, and meet inside the door, when their shopping was done. Joan found that she could get a very nice handkerchief with an ‘M’ on it, that only cost twenty-five cents, for her grandmother. She decided to buy another like it for dear Miss Joanna, with a ‘J’ in the corner. It was hard to get near the counters, there was such a crowd. She was sure Mrs. Jones would like some paper and

envelopes in a fancy box with holly on the cover. And Mr. Jones would surely like a bright blue necktie — he could not help it, for it would match his eyes. But what should she get for Uncle Sandy? He was very hard to please, and her money was going fast.

‘I think,’ said Harriet, ‘that your Uncle Sandy would like one of those little books bound in red. They are only ten cents, and there are a great many to choose from. I think he would like Dickens’s “Christmas Carol,” it is so Christmasy.’

‘Only ten cents, for such lovely things?’ said Joan, as she looked at the pile of books. They were bound in scarlet.

‘Oh, I wish I hadn’t got a handkerchief for Grandmother,’ said Joan. ‘I think she’d like the book better. I’ll get books for Nora and Delia and Anna.’

The children’s department was far more exciting than the rest of the store, for there was a life-size Santa Claus, and so many dolls that it made Joan think of the Doll Contest. There were all sorts of things for dolls, and Joan paused entranced, wondering whether she should get a doll’s handglass for Maud, or a tiny brush and comb. Maud and Bertha and

Laura were at the other end of the counter, and she saw Maud whisk a small package into her bag.

'I think she is getting something for me,' said Joan. 'I'm almost sure that it is for me, Harriet.'

Joan's money was all gone before she had bought anything for Tony, so she decided she would get some candy for him, when it was nearer Christmas, if she had some more money. 'I can get that in the village,' she said, 'at the candy shop where they had the Doll Contest. It will be fresher if I wait until the last minute.' She decided to give some candy to Asa, too, in case his feelings should be hurt if he did not have a present from her. She did not like Asa half so well as she liked Tony, but she did not want to hurt his feelings. And, after all, he was dear Harriet's brother. They had all just gone out of the store when Joan saw a bag lying in the street, close to the sidewalk. It had been trodden on and looked in a forlorn condition.

'There's a bag somebody has lost,' said Joan darting forward.

Tony and Asa ran ahead, and Asa picked it up and handed it to Joan.

'What a lovely bag it must have been before

it got spoiled by being stepped on,' said Joan. It was made of black velvet, and there were silver letters on it — 'M. L.'

'It feels very plump,' said Joan. 'It is chock full of Christmas presents, I guess.'

'What fun!' said Maud, who was just behind them, with Bertha and Laura. 'We can divide them and each have something. And perhaps there's money in the bag.'

'Joan found it,' said Bertha. 'It belongs to her.'

'There is probably an address in it and we can take it back to the owner,' said Harriet. 'As soon as we get into the car, we'll examine it, before we start.'

When they were peacefully settled in the automobile, Harriet handed the bag to Joan. 'You found it, you must open it,' she said.

It was as exciting as a grab bag. The first thing Joan took out was a black leather case with an optician's name on the cover. 'It is a pair of spectacles,' said Joan. 'They'll be very nice for Grandmother.' She took them out of the case and gravely put them on the bridge of her small nose. She looked so like her grandmother in miniature that everybody laughed. 'They are the divided kind,' she said, 'and I

can't see anything, either through the top or the bottom.'

'Be very careful of them. Put them back in the case at once,' said Harriet. 'We mustn't spoil any of the things. We shall have to advertise for the owner if we can't find any address in the bag.'

'Here's a purse,' said Joan. 'Perhaps that will have a card in it. Grandmother always has a card in her purse.'

Maud snatched the purse out of Joan's hand, and eagerly opened it. Asa tried to take it from her, and a scuffle ensued. Harriet vigorously took Asa by the arm, and Bertha seized Maud. 'You naughty children,' Harriet said; 'let Joan alone. It is her job.'

They dropped the open purse, and a shower of small coins fell on the bottom of the automobile. 'Pick up every penny and put it back,' Harriet commanded.

When this was done, Joan counted the money. 'There are five quarters, and two ten-cent pieces, and six five-cent pieces, and four pennies,' she said.

'We could each have a quarter,' said Asa, 'and Harriet and Bertha could divide the pennies.'

‘Oh, here is a lot more money,’ said Joan. ‘A five-dollar bill and two ones and a two.’

‘I’ll take the five-dollar bill,’ said Asa, with a laugh, ‘and you can divide the rest as you like.’

‘I don’t see any card,’ said Joan hopefully. ‘Perhaps we’ll advertise in some paper the lady doesn’t read. I must see what is in this little package — truly I must, Harriet. The lady shouldn’t have dropped her bag if she didn’t expect me to open the bundles.’ She was undoing the small package as she spoke.

‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘it is a Christmas present for some little girl. How sweet they are!’ As she spoke she held up a tiny brush and comb, and a doll’s mirror. They were like what Joan had seen in the store. She had finally chosen the brush and comb for Maud.

‘It does seem too much to give up things like that,’ said Joan with a sigh.

‘I wish I had a doll’s brush and comb — I just wish I had them,’ said Maud.

It was all Joan could do not to tell her that she was going to have them at Christmas.

‘Here’s another package. I must find what is in that. Oh, it’s a duck to sail in a bathtub. That’s for a very small child,’ said Joan. ‘I

don't mind letting the lady have the duck, but it truly does seem as if I couldn't give up the doll's handglass and brush and comb — it truly does seem as if I couldn't.'

Harriet, meanwhile, was examining the outer flap of the pocketbook. Here is a card with the address on it,' she said. The children groaned. 'Mrs. Alfred C. Leverett, and she lives here in Boston on Marlborough Street. We can stop there on the way out and give her the bag.'

There was another groan from the children. 'Perhaps she'll give a reward,' said Asa hopefully. 'Perhaps she'll say, "I know what it is to have spent all your money at Christmas time. Here's five dollars for the little chap who picked up the bag, and the girls can have a penny each!"'

'If there is any reward, which is not at all likely,' said Harriet, 'as we are such prosperous-looking people, it will be for Joan and nobody else. She and I will go up to the lady and give her the bag.'

When they reached the house where the lady lived who had dropped the velvet bag, there was great excitement in the automobile. Would the lady be at home? Would Harriet

really be so cruel as to let no one but Joan go up with her? Mr. Lane was appealed to. Would not Mrs. Alfred Leverett like a call from five children? Mr. Lane was firm in thinking that two people were quite enough to call on Mrs. Leverett. As Harriet and Joan went up the steps of the brown stone house they were watched by four pairs of envious eyes. Mrs. Leverett was evidently at home, for presently Harriet and Joan disappeared on the other side of the front door.

They were shown into a reception room and soon an elderly lady came downstairs. She looked too old to have a little girl young enough to play with dolls. Joan decided that she must be a grandmother. Harriet and Joan rose as she entered the room.

‘This is little Joan Morse,’ said Harriet. ‘She found this bag in the street this afternoon. Is it yours?’

A bright smile lighted up the lady’s face. ‘Yes, it is,’ she said. ‘I have been worrying about it all day. I was so afraid I had lost my spectacles, and they are a peculiar and expensive kind that it takes some time to make. How very good of you to come here at once. I am greatly obliged.’ She looked first at Joan

and then at Harriet. She was evidently considering what to do about giving a reward.

'I am especially glad to get these things tonight,' she said, 'for my little granddaughter is visiting me. She is sick in bed with a cold, and I promised I would bring her some things for her doll. She was woefully disappointed when I came home without anything.'

'How old is your little granddaughter?' asked Joan.

'Elsie is just five.'

'I thought she was very young,' said Joan, half to herself.

As Harriet rose to go Joan cast one longing glance at the bag as she followed her. The lady looked from one to the other in an undecided way.

'I wonder if you could not spend this on something for your doll? I am sure you have one,' she said, as she handed the shiniest of the quarters to Joan. 'Perhaps your doll would like a Christmas present.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Joan. Now she could get the handglass for Betsy. But she immediately thought of the other children waiting expectantly in the car. 'Would you mind giving me the quarter in five-cent pieces?' Joan asked.

‘Why, no,’ said the lady, looking a little puzzled, ‘certainly not, if I have them.’

‘You have them all right,’ said Joan. ‘We counted the money.’

‘Would you mind telling me why you would rather have the money in five-cent pieces?’ Mrs. Leverett asked. ‘I am of a curious disposition, and I have a little granddaughter upstairs who will want to know all about it.’

‘Well, you see,’ said Joan, ‘there are four more children in the automobile, and they ought to have something.’

‘But I thought you found the bag?’

‘Yes, but Asa picked it up for me; and Tony tried to; and Laura and Maud would have seen it if they had got there first.’

‘I see. I am glad to know all their names so that I can tell them to Elsie.’ She told Joan to keep the quarter, and then she handed her four more quarters. ‘I am sure that Asa and Tony—and, I forget the names of the others—’

‘Laura and Maud.’

‘I am sure they can all find some way of spending their money at Christmas time.’

It was a happy group of children who rode home that afternoon, eagerly discussing how they should spend their quarters.

‘I mean to get either a handglass for Betsy, or a brush for her or a comb,’ said Joan.

‘I wouldn’t if I were you,’ said Tony. ‘You never can tell what Santa Claus will put into your Christmas stocking.’

This remark was so exciting that Joan decided to buy Christmas candy for Tony and Asa with her quarter.

And when Christmas morning came, with that slowness with which time moves on the days when we wait eagerly for one special day, sure enough, there, in the very toe of her stocking, after she had taken out many delightful things for herself, were three presents for Betsy. One was a small handglass done up in white paper and tied with some stout gray string. On the paper was written, ‘Joan from Tony. Please forgive the string, the ribun gave out.’ There was another package tied with Christmas ribbon with Santa Claus on it and holly branches — first Santa Claus, then a holly branch, then Santa Claus again, and so on. On this package was written, ‘To my best friend, Joan, from Laura.’ It contained a small brush. A third parcel was tied with a gold cord, and it was from Maud, and this held a tiny celluloid comb. There was a fourth

parcel from Asa. In it was a little candlestick with a red candle in it.

‘Oh, how lovely!’ said Joan. ‘This is so unexpected.’

Although she did not like Asa half so well as she liked Tony, her heart softened to him when she saw this entrancing gift.

‘How nice of him to give me a present — how nice of him!’ she said to her grandmother. ‘And I came so near not giving him anything. I am so glad I gave him just as much candy as I gave Tony.’

CHAPTER XI

JOAN'S NEW YEAR'S PRESENT

IT seemed very flat the day after Christmas, for there were no exciting presents to look forward to.

'I wish Christmas came every month,' said Joan.

'Do you know, Joan,' said her grandmother, 'when I was a little girl we always had presents on New Year's Day instead of Christmas? So I am going to keep up the good old custom and give you a New Year's present.'

Joan was very much pleased. 'I do hope it's a pair of skates. I do hope it's a pair of skates,' she said to herself, over and over again. She felt, if she said it often enough, it would really be a pair of skates. There was a vacation that week, so Joan had a great deal of extra time to play.

'I am going to have a pair of new skates,' said Maud Saunders one day, 'and so is Asa. We are going to get them with our Christmas money. I do wish you knew how to skate, Joan. It is such fun.'

'I am to have a New Year's present, and I just hope it will be a pair of skates,' said Joan. 'I just long for a pair of skates.'

At last the great day came, and Mrs. Morse said to Joan: 'When you come back from Laura's house this morning, come up to my room. I think your present will be ready for you.'

The morning seemed very long, and Joan kept looking at the clock so many times that Laura said, 'You haven't got to go home until dinner, have you?'

'No,' said Joan, 'only just a little before dinner time.'

When she reached home she flew upstairs and into her grandmother's room. 'Please, Grandmother, is my present ready?' she asked.

'Yes, we'll go into your room now.'

They opened the door, and there, instead of the ugly black walnut writing-desk, was a beautiful mahogany table with carving on it, and two drawers with brass handles. It matched Joan's bureau. On top of it was a small writing-desk that was open, showing a dark red velvet covering.

'Oh, Grandmother, how lovely!' she said. The table had formerly stood in her grand-

mother's room, but she had never seen the desk before.

'I am glad to have you have it. It belonged to your great-great-grandmother. I had the velvet renewed; it was very worn and soiled. It used to be black, but I thought you would like the dull red better.'

'Yes, red is my favorite color.'

'My grandmother's father brought this desk home to his daughter when she was a young lady,' said Mrs. Morse. 'See, it has the initials "J. C." on the top of the cover to the little place at the top, where you can keep a rubber and pens.'

Joan looked, and there were the letters 'J. C.', which were two of her own initials. She lifted up the cover of the compartment, and inside it were three pencils — a blue one, a red one, and a black one — and a pen in a red pen-holder, and a rubber.

'Now, open the desk and see what is inside,' said Mrs. Morse.

Joan opened the lower half first, and there she found some envelopes and note-paper with colored pictures, and some colored postal cards. And when she opened the top half of the desk, she found a red penwiper inside, and a pearl-

handled knife, and, also, a ball of red string, and a ball of gold cord.

'Now, shut the cover down,' said her grandmother, 'and you will see the pretty Chinese picture on the top done in gold. See the trees and the pagoda and the Chinese house and the boat and the bridge over the river. Your great-great-great-grandfather was a merchant, and his ships went to far countries and brought back all sorts of things. This is much better than a pair of skates, isn't it?' Mrs. Morse asked.

'No, Grandmother, not better. It is very nice, indeed, and it was lovely of you to have it fixed over for me.'

'There is nothing dangerous about the desk,' said her grandmother. 'I had this same desk when I was a little girl. I had the desk instead of a pair of skates, for my mother thought I was not strong enough to learn.'

Joan was sure she should have the skates sometime. It was not possible, when one wanted anything as much as she wanted the skates, that she should not get it in time. 'I wanted a house for Betsy and I got it; and I wanted a doll's handglass and a brush and comb, and I found them in my Christmas

stocking; and I had a lovely red candle in a doll's candlestick without wishing for them at all, and lots of other things I didn't expect. So, if I wish hard enough, I know I shall get the skates sometime.'

January passed, however, and Joan did not get her skates. One day in February her grandmother said: 'I have to go to the Alliance this afternoon and it is so cold I am going in a taxi. You can come along with me for the ride, but when you get home, I don't want you to go out to play, for you still have a little cold. You can sit in my room by the fire, and, if no one comes to play with you, you can write letters or play with Betsy. Anna will bring your little desk into my room.'

Joan liked the trip in the closed taxi, with the heater for one's feet and when she got home she settled herself very happily in her grandmother's room. She had just begun a letter to Uncle Sandy when Maud and Laura came into the room.

'Dear Uncle Sandy, I wish Grandmother would let me learn to skate,' she had written, and it seemed an odd coincidence that her two friends had come to ask her to go skating with them.

'Asa has his new skates,' said Maud. 'He is sure his old ones will fit you. He and Tony are in the Copley meadow already, and he has the skates, and we'll teach you.'

'But I can't come,' said Joan. 'Grandmother told me to stay in by the fire. I have a little cold.'

'Nonsense,' said Maud. 'The fresh air will do your cold good. The sun is so bright, your grandmother couldn't mind your coming out just into the meadow. If the ice broke through you couldn't drown. Get your things on, and come along.'

Joan shook her head. She was sorely tempted to go with the other children, but she was an obedient child. The tears came into her eyes, for she wanted to go with them so much.

'Won't you stay here and play with me?' she begged.

They shook their heads. 'All the children are skating in the Copley meadow. It's perfectly safe; Mother let us go,' said Laura, 'and Asa and Tony are there, and Asa has his old skates all ready for you.'

It seemed to Joan that she had never wanted to do anything so much in her whole

life as to go skating in the Copley meadow. Seeing the animals was nothing to this. After all, would her grandmother mind so very much if she went? She knew that her grandmother would mind very much, indeed, and would feel that she could not be trusted. 'I can't go,' she spoke very sadly. 'Grandmother wouldn't like it.'

'Well, good-bye,' said the little girls. And off they went.

Her next caller was Asa. He had his old skates with him and tried them on Joan to see if they fitted her. They were a perfect fit.

'It does seem as if I had to go,' thought Joan; 'it truly does seem as if my heart would break if I couldn't learn to skate this afternoon.'

But Asa pleaded in vain. He left the skates, however, in case she should change her mind. She could not go on with her letter to Uncle Sandy; she was too unhappy. She tore it up and threw the pieces into the fire. This gave her great satisfaction to tear something up. She cried softly to herself, for she felt that she was a much-abused and unhappy child.

It was then that Harriet Lane found her.

Harriet did not seem to notice that Joan was crying.

'What a bright fire you have here,' said Harriet. 'It is very cold out of doors, and I don't feel a bit like skating. If you don't mind I'll take off my things and stay with you.'

Joan stopped crying and brightened up at once. 'I did want to go to the Copley meadow so,' she told Harriet. 'I just longed and longed to go with the other children and learn to skate.'

'Yes, I know, but you have a cold, and one always has to do what one is told. Did Laura tell you what happened to her last winter when she disobeyed her mother and went out to skate?'

'No,' said Joan.

'I'm sure she wouldn't mind my telling you. She was just getting over the grippe, and her Aunt Laura and her mother both went out, and a girl, who sometimes takes care of the children, was to come for the afternoon. But Laura felt lonely, and she slipped out to join the other children. She thought they were skating in the Copley meadow, but we had gone to Brown's Pond. She tried to find us, but she lost her way and was very cold and

hungry, and had a terrible time. She took cold again and had to go to bed for a few days. Poor Laura, it seemed hard! Now it is too bad you can't go out to-day, but I'll read aloud to you. And some day, when it is mild and the other children have gone to the pond, I'll teach you to skate in the Copley meadow. I taught Tony. I'm sure that your grandmother will let you learn, and we'll surprise the other children. We'll pretend you don't know how, and when they see you skating off, think how astonished they will be.'

'But Grandmother doesn't want me to learn to skate,' said Joan.

'Your grandmother is a very fair woman,' said Harriet. 'I am sure she will let me teach you, if I'll promise always to go with you. Think how lucky it is that you did not go off with the other children, for now your grandmother will say, "I can always trust Joan to do just what I say."'

Joan had such a pleasant afternoon with Harriet that she was surprised to see her grandmother coming back so soon.

'I have been telling Joan,' said Harriet, 'that I am quite sure you will let me take her to the Copley meadow and teach her to skate

some fine afternoon. Asa's old skates just fit her, and I'll promise always to go with her.'

Joan looked pleadingly at her grandmother.

'I've always felt,' said Mrs. Morse, 'that Joan takes cold so easily that the violent exercise wouldn't be good for her, and, then, there is a certain amount of danger.'

'There is no danger in the Copley meadow,' said Harriet.

'No, but if she once learns to skate she will not be satisfied with skating there. She'll want to go to Brown's Pond with the others. It is like kittens. They are all very well, but they are sure to grow into cats.'

Her grandmother did not say that she could not learn, however, and this was hopeful.

That afternoon Mrs. Morse had a letter from Uncle Sandy.

'We'll see what he says about your learning to skate when he comes on,' she said. For Uncle Sandy was to make one of his flying visits.

Mrs. Morse had a long talk with Uncle Sandy about Joan the evening that he came, and so he knew how much she wanted to learn to skate, and what the objections were in his mother's mind. As Joan and Uncle Sandy

were breakfasting together, she tried to get up her courage to say, 'Uncle Sandy, don't you think I had better learn to skate?' But she did not dare to say anything about it for fear he would say, 'That is out of the question,' and then there would be no hope.

Uncle Sandy ate his breakfast in silence, for he was reading the newspaper. At last he looked up. 'It is a fine day,' he said. 'It would be a good day to go skating. How I wish my day wasn't chock full. Then I would try to borrow a pair of skates.'

Then Joan plucked up her courage. 'Uncle Sandy,' she said in a very small voice, 'Grandmother thinks I had better not learn, but, oh, Uncle Sandy, I'm just crazy to learn, and Harriet will teach me in the Copley meadow. All the other children know how, who are no bigger than I. And, oh, Uncle Sandy, it won't be at all the same to learn when I'm bigger. I'll have farther to fall, and I'll lose all that time. Oh, please, Uncle Sandy, don't you think I had better learn right off now? It won't cost anything, for Asa will give me his old skates, and they just fit me.'

Uncle Sandy sipped his coffee and seemed in no hurry to reply. 'This is exceedingly good coffee,' he said.

Joan was very impatient. 'Oh, please, Uncle Sandy,' she begged.

'I've told your grandmother that I think it is better for you to be out of doors as much as possible, and skating seems a good form of exercise. She never tried it, poor woman, so she does not know its joys. If Harriet can come for you, this seems just the kind of day for the first lesson. You can learn on Asa's skates, but I want you to have the newest and shiniest sort. I am going to get Harriet to buy a new pair for you when you have learned.'

'Oh, Uncle Sandy!' Joan was too happy to say more. She got up from the table and danced around it to the other end where Uncle Sandy was finishing his last mouthful of toast. She wondered if Uncle Sandy would like the sort of bear's hug that she gave her grandmother. She stood undecided before his chair. He pushed it back and took her in his lap.

'There is just time for one story before I go into Boston,' he said. 'Shall it be about a cat or a dog or a little boy or a little girl?' he asked.

'About some real children you have known,' Joan said. 'About yourself and my father when you were little boys, and how you used to go skating.'

CHAPTER XII

HOUSE-HUNTING

THERE was an unusual amount of snow in February, and Joan had the joys of coasting and skating to her heart's content. But the snow vanished quickly, and the first days of premature heat toward the end of March set every one to making plans for the summer.

The tenants who had taken Mrs. Morse's house at Nahant the year before wanted it again. 'We must go to the seashore. I can't spend another summer as I did last year,' she said. 'And you ought to be away all summer, Joan. But Nahant isn't just the place for you. I wonder if there are any cottages to be rented at Rocky Cove, where the Marshes go?'

Joan danced up and down in her excitement. 'Oh, Grandmother, I am sure there are. Mrs. Marsh said the other day that they have two cottages, and the one they don't live in isn't rented, and she said that Mr. Perry's cottage could be rented, for he is going abroad to study painting as soon as he and Miss Marsh are married.'

'I think,' said Mrs. Morse, 'that in April, when the weather is fine, we shall have to go house-hunting.'

Mrs. Marsh always went to Rocky Cove early in the season to see about planting her garden.

'Last year I took Tony with me,' she said to Mrs. Morse. 'I am going to take him again this year. Laura will spend the day with the Rands; they are going to take her to the theater. If you and Joan care to join us, it will be a good time to see the houses. We can take a picnic lunch and eat it in our cottage, and we can have hot coffee in a thermos bottle.'

This was such a delightful prospect that Joan could think of little else. She could not help speaking of it at school to Tony, and Maud heard the conversation and told Asa. Asa wanted to go and spoke to his Aunt Hattie about it.

'Can't we all go down in the automobile?' he said. 'It would be a lot easier for them, and then Harriet and I could go too.'

Mrs. Morse could not very well decline the kind offer, although she was sorry to have Asa added to the company. Joan was sorry, too,

for she thought she would have had such a good time, just with Tony, but it was always pleasant to do anything with dear Harriet, and the ride in the automobile would be great fun — so much pleasanter than a ride in the train.

And so, on a bright April morning, the Lanes' car came around to their door. Harriet was already in it, sitting beside Mrs. Marsh on the back seat; and Tony and Asa were in front with the chauffeur. Mrs. Morse was settling herself on the back seat, and Joan was in one of the side seats, when a little figure with a basket in her hand was seen coming along the lane. She had on a long red coat that matched her stocking cap and looked ready for traveling. It was Maud Saunders.

'Mother said she knew there would be room for me,' said Maud. 'I've got candy and oranges and two kinds of sandwiches and cakes and olives in the basket, so I shan't take any of your food — I mean, not any more than I bring — we can change around.'

The older ladies did not look very enthusiastic, but Maud did not mind that. She was sure of a welcome from the children.

'I just love the front seat,' said Maud.

‘Would one of you boys just as lief sit behind and let me sit in front?’

Tony was obligingly about to change seats, although he loved to be in front with Asa, when Mrs. Morse asserted herself. The automobile was not hers, to be sure, but she was the oldest person present.

‘Maud can sit on the other side seat. If you go, you must sit where it is the most convenient to have you,’ she said with decision. ‘Tony and Asa have their places already.’

Maud got in without another word. ‘She is a cross old thing,’ she thought. ‘I’m glad she isn’t my grandmother.’ And, yet, she felt an unwilling admiration for her. She always felt this for any one who made her mind.

‘How pushing some people are,’ was what Mrs. Morse thought. ‘But after all, it isn’t the poor child’s fault. It is the way she was brought up, and there are some very good things about Maud. She never bears any malice.’

It was a marvelous day, a foretaste of summer. Joan leaned back in her seat, too happy to talk; and this ride was just the beginning. There would be a whole day by the sea, and Joan loved the sea as only one can who has

spent most of her life by it. It was not a long life, to be sure, but it seemed long to Joan. She was a very happy little girl when they got to the seashore, for it seemed like getting home. Harriet took the children down to the beach. Asa and Tony ran on ahead and were soon perched on the highest rock. There was a strong east wind, and so there was a real surf coming in among the rocks, which was always an event in the quiet cove. Joan and Maud watched the green breakers roll in and break into feathery white foam.

‘Oh,’ said Joan, ‘how good it does smell!’

‘We’ll see if we can find any lucky stones,’ said Harriet. ‘Tony and I found a lot of them last summer. They have a line of white around them, and they are supposed to bring the best of luck.’

The little girls ran along the stony beach, and Joan was the first to find one. ‘Oh, look, Harriet,’ she said, ‘here is a beautiful one with a band of white all around it.’

‘Oh, please let me have it,’ said Maud.

‘No,’ said Harriet, ‘the spell is broken if you do not find it yourself.’

While the older people were looking at the houses that were to be rented, the little girls

were house-hunting for their dolls. Presently Joan found a small cave in the rocks.

'See, Harriet,' she said, 'here is a house for Betsy. It has stone walls and a stone roof, and there is room for some furniture.'

'I am afraid the furniture would get washed away,' said Harriet. 'See how wet the floor of the house is. The water comes in at high tide. She would not have a dry cellar.'

'I didn't mean real furniture. I meant driftwood seats and a table with stones for legs and a driftwood top, and a bed with a seaweed mattress. And we could come here at low tide.'

'If Betsy is satisfied with things like that, it will be a good house for her,' said Harriet.

'She'll have to be,' said Joan. 'One can't expect all the home things when one is camping out.'

A little later Maud found a place, high up where the surf would never come, even in winter storms. It was a cozy nook, near the path at the top of the cliff, under a spreading tree that would make a pleasant shade. Maud was sure that Adrianna would greatly prefer this place. 'She and Betsy can live here,' she said.

‘It is too public,’ said Joan. ‘My place is much the best, and Adrianna can live with Betsy.’

‘I like mine much the best,’ said Maud. ‘It will be fun to watch the people going by, and your cave will be too damp for Adrianna. She always takes cold if she gets her feet wet.’

They were having one of their ‘discussions,’ which Harriet was afraid would end in a quarrel.

‘Suppose you wait until Betsy and Adrianna are here,’ she said. ‘It may be that they will never come here. Mrs. Morse may not like either of the houses.’

‘If Joan is here, I’ll make Mother take a cottage here,’ said Maud. ‘Mother hates Aunt Joanna’s farm, it is so noisy. She says the crickets and whippoorwills make such a noise, and that the cocks wake her up in the morning.’

‘Sometimes the sea is noisy,’ said Harriet. ‘It is to-day.’

‘The sea is different,’ said Maud. ‘It makes a grand noise that keeps on. It is different from cocks; it seems as if they could stop if they had a mind to.’

When Mrs. Marsh came down to tell them

that luncheon was ready, the great question had been decided. Mrs. Morse was to take Mr. Perry's house for the summer. This was a disappointment to Mrs. Marsh, for she was anxious to rent her cottage.

'I am sure your Uncle Sandy will make us a longer visit if he is comfortable,' Mrs. Morse said to Joan. 'He can be in Mr. Perry's studio and feel perfectly independent, and the sleeping-porch on the other part of the house will be just the place for you to sleep.'

'There is a garden at the back of the house, and a pool above it that used to be a quarry pool which belongs to the house that I am renting,' said Mrs. Marsh. 'It is full of water-lilies and cardinal flowers, and all sorts of lovely things, in the summer.'

They had their lunch in the living-room in Mrs. Marsh's cottage. There was a fire of logs burning on the hearth, and the appetizing meal was spread on the table. Maud's generous contribution was a great addition.

'I know Mother'll want to take the other cottage,' Maud said, as they were eating their lunch.

'I don't think your mother would like it,' said Mrs. Marsh. 'It is inconvenient in many ways, and there are no electric lights.'

Much as she needed the money from the rent of the cottage, she did not want Mrs. Saunders for a tenant. She knew how much fault she would find.

'There aren't any electric lights at Aunt Joanna's,' said Maud. 'Mother won't mind that.'

'It is an inconvenient cottage,' Mrs. Marsh repeated, 'and it is not thoroughly screened, and the kitchen stove is poor. I am sure your mother would not be comfortable there, and I don't want to do anything more to it this season.'

'Mother can fix it up,' said Maud. 'Mother knows just how to fix things up.'

'Yes, I know,' said Mrs. Marsh, 'but I am afraid she won't like that steep path up the hill. There is no way for an automobile to get to the front door.'

'I know Mother will like it if I do,' said Maud. 'They call me the Chief Ruler at home.'

'Maud,' said Mrs. Morse, asserting herself for the second time that day, 'I don't think a little girl of eight can tell at all what her mother will want. She will have to come and see it herself.'

Maud, however, had her mind quite made

up. She knew her mother would like her to be near Laura and Tony and Joan. What a good time they would all have, playing together! It would be a nice change from the farm.

After lunch the children went again to the beach, but it was a disappointment that they had such a short time there, for Mrs. Morse was so tired that she wanted to get home early.

‘It has been a wonderful day,’ Joan said that night to her grandmother, after she reached home and they were having their supper together. ‘I wish we had that kind of frosted cake that Maud brought. Wasn’t it fortunate she went with us? It will be such fun if they take the cottage.’

CHAPTER XIII

THE NOISY FROGS

JOAN's school closed early and she and her grandmother were able to be at Rocky Cove by the end of May. The Marshes came down with them in a large touring-car, and every corner that was not occupied by people or animals was stuffed with bags and bundles.

Joan went about the house exclaiming over everything in delight.

'It is all so nice, Grandmother,' she said. 'I like it a lot better for summer than our other house, except for one thing.'

'And what is that?' asked her grandmother.

'I miss the part of the family that is left behind.'

'But Anna will come down later and one of the others will take her place. Some one has to be left behind to take care of the house.'

'I wasn't thinking of Anna; I was thinking of Tommy and Tilly. They would have such a fine time in this sea air, the darlings.'

'They would be very unhappy if they were

moved,' said her grandmother. 'Pussy cats love their own homes.'

'But the Marshes brought their animals down,' said Joan. 'Perry Airedale loves it at the seashore, and so does Sandy. Isn't it funny they should have a cat with Uncle Sandy's name? I am sure Tilly and Tommy would just love it here.'

'They have been kept in the house most of the time since we have had them,' said Mrs. Morse. 'We could not keep them closed in down here. They might run away and get lost. I am sure their own place is the best for them.'

'I'm glad you thought this was the best place for me,' said Joan.

Maud had her wish, for her mother had decided to take Mrs. Marsh's other house. Mrs. Saunders was delayed by one thing and another so that it was the middle of June before she arrived. Joan and Laura had spent the afternoon running up the hill so as to be on the spot to welcome Maud. At last, when it was nearly six o'clock, they saw the taxi from the station coming up the hill.

'Is this as far as you can drive?' Mrs. Saunders asked.

'Yes, ma'am.'

‘You must wait then and help us with our bags and bundles.’

‘I can’t, ma’am. I have another order.’

‘I never heard of such a thing. You must wait,’ said Mrs. Saunders.

‘I can’t, ma’am. I am sorry, but the other passengers have to get the next train.’

‘We’ll help with the bags,’ said Joan, darting forward and seizing a hatbox.

‘That’s too heavy for you, child,’ said Mrs. Saunders. ‘Eliot, what are you about! Don’t let that child carry anything. Oh, you have the suitcases. Bertha, don’t let Joan carry the hatbox. It is too heavy for her.’

The bags and bundles were all taken into the house, and Joan and Maud and Laura were chattering as fast as their tongues could fly.

‘We had to leave Bridget behind to close the house,’ said Maud. ‘She’s coming tomorrow. It was so nice having Mrs. Marsh down here to get this house ready. Oh, what lovely wild roses on the table!’

‘Laura and I picked them,’ said Joan proudly.

It was just as Mrs. Marsh had feared it would be. Mrs. Saunders found many things that were wrong in the house, but, as Maud

had said, she liked to fix things. Mrs. Marsh thought she had foreseen all the drawbacks, but she had never once thought of the frogs that inhabited the quarry pool. She was so used to their croakings that it seemed only a pleasant part of the summer concert.

One morning Maud came down the hill in a state of great excitement. Joan was on the piazza playing with Betsy.

‘Mother says something has got to be done about those frogs,’ she said. ‘She can’t sleep a wink at night.’

‘Not any at all?’ said Joan.

‘Not enough to be any good. She doesn’t get to sleep for ever so long because they make such a racket.’

‘I am so sorry,’ said Joan. ‘Does Mrs. Marsh know about it?’

‘Mother’s going to see her to-day. But I thought I’d just run down and tell you about it. It is very serious. Mother says she’ll have to give up her lease if something can’t be done about the frogs.’

‘But what can be done?’ said Joan hopelessly. ‘I like to hear them. It sounds so sociable. Don’t you suppose your mother will get used to them?’

‘Mother never gets used to things that trouble her. She says frogs are much worse than roosters because they keep it up so long. Oh, Joan, it will be terrible if we all have to go home, for we love it here so. And it will be warm enough soon to go in bathing in the cove. Eliot has been in already.’

Maud was almost in tears. Joan had never seen her so troubled.

‘I thought maybe your grandmother would think of something to do, she seems so wise,’ said Maud.

‘I don’t think Grandmother could make the frogs stop singing,’ said Joan.

When the two little girls found Mrs. Morse, they talked so fast that she could not make out what it was all about.

‘Speak slower and one at a time,’ she said. ‘What is wrong at your house, Maud?’

‘It is the frogs. Mother can’t get used to the noise they make,’ said Maud.

‘She says she can’t stand them, and that she may have to give up her lease,’ said Joan.

‘That would be terrible,’ said Maud. ‘Please, Mrs. Morse, can’t you think of something that can be done?’

‘Which side of the house does your mother sleep on?’ asked Mrs. Morse.

‘On the side near the frogs. She likes that room best.’

‘I should advise her to take the room on the other side of the house and stuff her ears with cotton wool.’

‘Bertha and I have the room farthest from the frogs. It isn’t half so nice a room. Mother tried it the first two nights, and she didn’t like it at all, so we had to move. You can hear the frogs anywhere in the house.’

‘You can hear them very plainly here,’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘They kept me awake part of the time, when we first came, but I’ve got used to them.’

‘Mother never gets used to things,’ said Maud.

‘If she minds them so much I should advise her to go somewhere else herself and ask your Aunt Joanna to come here and keep house for you children,’ said Mrs. Morse.

‘That would be lovely, to have Aunt Joanna here,’ said Joan.

‘She isn’t your Aunt Joanna,’ Maud reminded her.

‘It is what she asked me to call her,’ Joan said with firmness.

‘Mother doesn’t want to go,’ said Maud.

‘She loves it here, all but the frogs. She wondered if Mrs. Marsh would be willing to drain the pond.’

‘To drain the pond?’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘That wouldn’t do any good, because the quarry pools are fed by springs.’

‘She thought maybe the frogs would go away to some other place if there wasn’t any water.’

‘I think it would be simpler for your mother to go than for the frogs to go,’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘There is only one of her. I am sorry. I will try to think if there is anything that can be done.’

‘I wonder if we could fish the frogs out and take them a long way off?’ said Maud.

‘They’d miss the water,’ said Joan.

‘There is a nice pond down the road,’ said Maud. ‘It is much bigger and better than the quarry pool. They’d like it a lot better.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Joan doubtfully.

Mrs. Saunders caught eagerly at the idea of having the frogs fished out of the pool and taken to the larger pond, and Mrs. Marsh consented to have the experiment tried. The children were all eager to help, and Eliot said if he had a scoop-net he was sure he could

catch every frog in the pool. So the next afternoon the children all went to the pool with Mrs. Marsh and Mrs. Saunders.

The pool had a rocky edge and it was full of water-lily pads. There was many a cozy home for the frogs, but at last, Eliot saw one jumping into the pool, and he went after it with the scoop-net. He could not catch it, for the frog was too quick for him.

‘Oh, Eliot, how slow you are!’ said his mother.

‘But, Mother, it went quick as a flash,’ said Maud. ‘Nobody could catch it.’

Mrs. Saunders sat on the stone bench near the pool and gave directions.

‘There goes a frog. Quick, Eliot, quick, you’ll lose him.’

Eliot shut his lips firmly together and said nothing. Presently he made a dive for another frog. This time he was successful. He landed the frog in the net and then put it into a glass preserve-jar.

‘Mother, you can hold that jar,’ he said; ‘then you can make sure the frog doesn’t get away.’

Mrs. Saunders put her plump hand over the top of the jar and looked at the creature inside

with disgust. Another frog came in view, and Eliot went after him. The frog leaped away and Eliot went in hot pursuit.

‘There he goes,’ said Tony.

‘He has hid behind that lily-pad,’ said Laura.

‘Oh, he’s got off,’ said Joan. She hardly knew whether to be sorry or glad, for her sympathies were divided.

When Eliot finally caught the frog, all the children clapped their hands.

‘Let me try,’ said Maud.

‘You bet I won’t,’ said Eliot. ‘Who’s running this show, anyway?’

Joan rushed down the hill for her grandmother, for she thought it a pity that she should miss the fun. ‘Grandmother!’ she cried, ‘Eliot has caught four already. He thinks there can’t be more than twelve. I hope they’ll like their new home. The pond is a lot bigger than the pool, but they hate the preserve-jar, poor dears. They think it’s a prison.’

Mrs. Morse went slowly up the hill after Joan and arrived a little breathless. Mrs. Saunders made room for her on the bench. The exciting game lasted all the afternoon, because it took so long to catch the frogs. As

soon as a jar had two frogs in it, Mrs. Marsh took it down to the larger pond. Joan and Laura usually went with her. Tony and Maud could not tear themselves away from the exciting scene at the pool.

‘I don’t see another frog, Mother. I think I’ve got them, every one,’ said Eliot. ‘I hope you’ll have a good sleep to-night.’

‘I certainly need one,’ said Mrs. Saunders.

She had a good night, but the trouble began the night after. For as twilight came on she once more heard the voice of the frogs.

‘Eliot, you couldn’t have caught them all,’ she said. ‘I hear them very plainly. Those that are left make almost as much noise as the others.’

‘I thought I got them all,’ said Eliot. ‘But I’ll try again.’

He was beginning to get a little tired of the game, and it had lost its first zest for the other children. The tide was getting lower in the morning, and the bathing was excellent in the afternoon. However, he good-naturedly went up to the pool and began fishing for the frogs again. That afternoon Joan went to the pond with Mrs. Marsh when she took down the first installment of frogs.

‘I wonder where they’ve all gone,’ said Joan, for the pond seemed very empty of life. It was a clear pond, with no water-lilies in it. ‘Do you suppose they can all be hiding in the rocks?’

‘Protective coloration has a great deal to do with it,’ said Mrs. Marsh. ‘They are so nearly the color of the rocks that we may not be able to see them.’

Joan stopped at the kitchen door on her way home. Nora was inside making gingerbread for supper.

‘Isn’t it funny, Nora,’ she said, ‘the frogs bothered Mrs. Saunders again last night, and Eliot thought he had caught them all.’

‘It isn’t funny at all,’ said Nora. ‘Frogs love their homes, same as people do. Of course they would come back as fast as they could. I stumbled over two of them when I was coming home the other night. You can go on catching frogs all summer, and putting them in the other pond if you like, but it is about as sensible as expecting a leaky boat to keep dry.’

‘But, Nora,’ said Joan, much excited, ‘how do you know so much about frogs?’

‘We had a well at my home in Maine,’ said Nora, ‘and a frog lived in it. And we children thought it might not be good for the water to

have him live there, so we used to catch him and put him away off in the pasture, until we found it wasn't any good. He loved his home, and he traveled back every night.'

'Why didn't you tell us the frogs would come back?' Joan asked.

'I can't waste my time in conversation with Mrs. Saunders,' said Nora. 'She would never have believed me unless she had tried the experiment herself. And catching frogs is as good a way of spending your time as any, when you haven't more important things to do.' She put the gingerbread in the oven as she spoke.

Joan wasn't wholly satisfied. She wanted to know more about it. And when Uncle Sandy came down for his summer visit she appealed to him. He liked the studio so well that he was going to spend almost all of his vacation with his mother.

'Uncle Sandy,' Joan asked, 'do all frogs come hopping back when you put them in some other place, or only a few? I should think some would like the new home best.'

'I am sure the frogs all came back as fast as they could,' said Uncle Sandy. 'Frogs collect at the water's edge to lay their eggs, for the eggs can develop only in water. So, of course,

they were in a great hurry to get home. They have a sense of direction, you see, just as pussy cats do and dogs. We can't drive them out, but we will try to make the pool as attractive as we can. We'll get some goldfish. They don't make a noise, and they will look very pretty swimming about, and will be an advantage to the pool.'

'Oh, Uncle Sandy, but where can we get them?'

'Some day, when I have to go to Boston, I will bring some home to you,' he said.

CHAPTER XIV

BUYING THE GOLDFISH

MRS. SAUNDERS was getting used to the frogs, as one does to the inevitable, and yet, when she was invited by some cousins to take an automobile trip with them, she decided to go if her sister-in-law would come and keep house for her for the fortnight that she would be away.

‘Come for a few days before I leave, dear Joanna,’ she wrote, ‘so that I can have a good sight of you, and stay as long as you can after I return. There is one serious objection to the place — the noisy frogs in a microscopic quarry pool. But perhaps you will not mind them, as a farm is a noisy place, too.’

Miss Joanna wrote that she would gladly come, and every one was looking forward to her visit.

‘Mother, I think I shall have to go to town to-day,’ Uncle Sandy said one morning. ‘I have some errands to do.’

‘Oh, please, Uncle Sandy, take me with you,’

Joan begged. 'And then we can buy the goldfishes you promised to get for the pool.'

'Your Uncle Sandy does not want to be bothered with you, I am sure,' said her grandmother.

'Please, Uncle Sandy, take me. It is so important to get the right goldfishes. I want to choose them myself.'

It was very difficult to refuse Joan anything she had set her heart on, and Uncle Sandy hesitated.

'Don't tease,' said Mrs. Morse.

Uncle Sandy relented. Whatever his private wishes might be, there was something very appealing in Joan's brown eyes, and perhaps he remembered what a good little traveling companion she had been.

'You could put me in somebody's care while you were doing your other errands, and we could go to the goldfish shop together,' she suggested.

'All right. Come along, little woman. Run up and get ready. I'd like to take the next bus.'

Joan ran upstairs in a joyful mood. Her grandmother followed her, to make sure that she put on the most suitable dress for the trip.

‘You must take your sweater along with you in case an east wind comes up,’ she said.

‘Oh, bother. It is so warm. Uncle Sandy, do you think I need a sweater?’

‘Yes, take the sweater. We don’t know what the weather may be by afternoon.’

‘Afternoon?’ said Joan. ‘Are we going to stay until afternoon? I thought we were coming back for lunch.’

‘If we go, we don’t want to hurry back. We’ll have lunch somewhere together.’

‘Oh, Uncle Sandy, what fun!’

She waved her hand gayly to her grandmother as she and her uncle went down to the road. As they were waiting for the omnibus, Tony and Laura passed them.

‘Where are you going?’ asked Joan.

‘To the fish store to buy fish for Mother. Where are you going?’ Laura asked.

‘Uncle Sandy and I are going to Boston to buy goldfishes for the pool.’

‘You’ll lose your bath,’ said Laura.

‘One can’t have everything,’ said Joan.

‘I’d much rather go in swimming on such a hot day,’ said Laura.

‘Well, I’d a lot rather go to Boston with Uncle Sandy and buy goldfishes,’ said Joan.

They both appeared to be perfectly satisfied, and yet Joan thought regretfully of the bath she was to lose, and Laura thought what fun it would be to choose the goldfish.

As they were sitting in the train bound for Boston, Joan seized her uncle's hand.

'Uncle Sandy, isn't this great?' she said. 'It seems like the journey from California. If only Aunt Joanna would get on the train! And she's coming to-day. Uncle Sandy, couldn't we meet her train? Then we could all come back together.'

'Perhaps we might,' said Uncle Sandy.

Uncle Sandy's first errand was at a trust company. He said Joan could sit in the little place railed off for ladies, while he was getting his money. She was very much interested in all that was going on. There was a lady sitting at a table writing out a check. She had picked up a slip of paper with 'Myself' printed on it, and she was writing in some figures and signing her name to it. So this was the way that people got money. Joan had seen checks before, but she had never been in the place where the money was kept. She thought how nice it would be to get some money out — one dollar, five dollars, or ten. But it could not

be that anybody could come in and get out whatever money he liked. There must be more to it than that. She would ask Uncle Sandy about it. She did, and he told her that you could not get money out unless you had first put some in.

'Did you have money in the bank here?' she asked him.

'No, my money is in a bank in Chicago, and my check was on the bank there, but they know me here, and so they let me have the money. They will get it back in time from the people in the bank there.'

This seemed very complicated to Joan, and, as she liked to understand everything as she went along, she asked so many questions that her uncle finally said: 'As you won't be old enough to go into the banking business for some years, we'll drop the subject. I've got to get a new straw hat. If your Aunt Joanna is coming, I don't want to look shabby.'

'I think that is a very good hat you've got on,' said Joan.

'I'm glad you like it, but it is last year's style. I'll let you help me choose one.'

There were other errands about which Joan gave her help, and the morning slipped by very fast.

‘We’ll have an early lunch,’ said Uncle Sandy, ‘and afterwards we’ll get the goldfish, and then it will be time to meet your Aunt Joanna’s train. I am glad you thought of that. We can help her with her bags and all go back on the train together.’

Lunch was a serious affair, for Uncle Sandy asked Joan what she would like. She gravely consulted the bill of fare, but all her favorite dishes were so expensive that she did not like to choose them.

‘Please, Uncle Sandy, you choose,’ she said. ‘I like almost everything except tripe.’

‘I was thinking of getting roast chicken and mashed potato, and peas and currant jelly and strawberry ice cream for myself,’ said Uncle Sandy, ‘but if you want a different order, I’ll get anything you like.’

‘Oh, Uncle Sandy, that is perfectly wonderful, but it costs a lot.’

‘I have just been to the bank and got some money. I think my pocketbook can stand the strain.’

Joan had a delightful time eating her dinner. A piece of frosted cake was added to the menu, with a cup of chocolate for her and coffee for her uncle.

‘Bless my soul, it takes very little to make some people happy,’ he said as he watched her radiant face.

‘Little! But, Uncle Sandy, it is like a Thanksgiving dinner.’

‘I’ve no doubt we can both of us think of something to be thankful for,’ he said.

‘Oh, lots of things, and to-day is especially a day to be thankful for because Aunt Joanna is coming.’

‘Do you like her so much as all that?’

‘I like her better than any grown person, except Grandmother. Of course, I love Grandmother best of all.’

‘But your grandmother is pretty old to have the care of a little girl.’

‘Oldness hasn’t anything to do with it. Grandmother and I are alike in lots of ways. She says so herself.’

They were out in the street again, and Joan’s eyes were busy with the street sights, and her ears with the street sounds.

‘What an awful racket there is in a city, Uncle Sandy,’ she said. ‘I like seashore sounds much the best. I love the swish of the sea, and I don’t mind the frogs a bit. Poor dears, they are so happy now they have got back to their home.’

‘There will be a perfect din of noise in the shop where the goldfish are,’ Uncle Sandy said. ‘I’m glad you don’t mind noise.’

And sure enough it was true. The noise in the shop was deafening. Joan had never been in such an interesting shop. She went from one part of it to the other and longed to buy a specimen of everything in the place.

The canaries were singing in chorus, and a monkey was chattering and parrots were screaming, and it seemed as if everything that could make a noise was making it. But the goldfish were very quiet, swimming about in a great tank. Joan thought how pretty they looked as the light caught them. When the woman who was in charge found they wanted six goldfish she took down a scoop-net, very much like the one Eliot had had to catch the frogs, and she went over to the tank. Joan saw a goldfish with a black spot on his tail that was so pretty she felt she must have it.

‘Please,’ she said, ‘let me have that one.’

The woman tried her best to catch it, and the goldfish darted away and escaped. It was as exciting a game as catching the frogs. Finally the woman caught it and put it in a glass jar full of water, with holes in the cover. It all seemed like the frogs over again.

When six had been caught, Joan and her uncle went back to the station to wait for Miss Joanna's train. It was not quite time for it to come, so they sat down in the waiting-room. Joan was greatly interested in watching the people sitting there. There was one family of a father and mother with three small children and a baby.

One of the children was crying, and Joan said: 'Uncle Sandy, don't you think we could take over the goldfishes and show them to that little girl? I think it might comfort her.'

So they took over the jar of goldfish, and the little girl brightened up at once.

At last the train from New Hampshire came in. Joan and her uncle stood by the gate so as to be sure not to miss Aunt Joanna. Her uncle had on his new straw hat and looked very nice. Joan was sorry that the monkey at the shop had made a spot on her dress when he threw some of his dinner at her from behind the bars of his cage. There were a great many people on the train. First some strong young men came by them walking very fast; then some women; and lastly, some families with children; but there was no tall, familiar figure in gray.

‘She may be on the last car and a little long in getting out,’ Uncle Sandy said hopefully.

They walked along the platform, but finally it was evident that every passenger had left the train.

‘She hasn’t come,’ said Joan. ‘Uncle Sandy, do you suppose she isn’t coming at all?’

‘She’ll probably come to-morrow,’ he said.

‘It is very disappointing, isn’t it, Uncle Sandy? But, anyway, we’ve got the goldfishes, and that’s what we came for.’

They were very quiet on their journey home. Joan was tired, and somehow not meeting Aunt Joanna made the day seem different.

‘Did you have a pleasant time, dear?’ her grandmother asked when she and Uncle Sandy got home.

‘Very pleasant, except Aunt Joanna didn’t come.’

‘But she came on an earlier train,’ said Mrs. Morse. ‘She surprised us all by getting here before lunch, for she spent the night in Salem.’

‘Oh, how nice!’ said Joan.

She wanted to go to see her that minute, but it was almost supper time, and her grandmother said she must wait until afterwards.

‘Uncle Sandy, we’ll take up the goldfishes



THE GOLDFISH

after supper and let Aunt Joanna help us put them in the little pool,' said Joan. 'She'll just love the goldfishes.'

After supper Joan and Uncle Sandy went up to the other house. He had the goldfish with him. They had supper later at that house, and they had not quite finished eating. Joan and her uncle could hear the sounds accompanying a merry meal coming from the dining-room. Uncle Sandy said they would sit down in the porch and wait. But Joan was not contented with this. She ran into the dining-room and seized Aunt Joanna's hand.

'Aunt Joanna,' she said, 'Uncle Sandy and I went to meet your train and you weren't on it, and he had a new straw hat, and we got some goldfishes, and we have them outside, and when you have finished supper won't you come up to the pool and help us put them in?'

It was delightful to have Aunt Joanna here, and Joan clung to her hand as she went to the pool with the children after supper. Maud had her other hand, and Eliot ran on ahead. Tony and Laura Marsh were there too, for putting the goldfish in the pool was quite a ceremony.

Uncle Sandy went down to the water's edge and took the top off the jar and released the

goldfish and emptied them into the water. They swam away like bright bits of red gold, making the water look full of life.

‘There goes the little one with the black spot!’ cried Joan. ‘He is my favorite. Oh, Aunt Joanna, I am so glad you have come. It is such fun to have you here.’

‘She isn’t your Aunt Joanna,’ Maud reminded her. But all the answer Joan made was to squeeze Miss Joanna’s hand.

‘I asked her to call me “Aunt Joanna.” I have quite a number of nieces and nephews I have chosen, besides the real ones.’

CHAPTER XV

PLANS FOR JOAN

ONE day Joan repeated a piece of gossip to her grandmother. It was something Mrs. Saunders had said about Nora.

‘How did you happen to hear that?’ asked her grandmother.

‘Maud and I were in the next room and the door was open, so I could hear everything she said. She was talking to Laura’s mother, and Laura’s mother said Nora was all right and a splendid girl.’

‘Now, my dear Joan,’ said her grandmother, ‘you mustn’t listen to conversations not meant for you to hear. There is a proverb that says, “Listeners never hear any good of themselves.” Some day, if you listen, you will hear something about yourself that you won’t like, for although you are a dear child, we all have our faults.’

‘But, Grandmother,’ Joan protested, ‘when I am on the sleeping-porch and people are sitting on the piazza under me, I can’t help hearing what they say, and sometimes it is so in-

teresting. And everybody knows I'm there; they shouldn't say what they don't want me to hear. I can't get up and run away, for I might go to sleep in some other place than the sleeping-porch bed, and you wouldn't like that.'

'The sleeping-porch is different. We all know you are there and may not have gone to sleep, and if we are careless and forget, that is our lookout. Only, darling, you must never repeat the things you hear, for that wouldn't be fair.'

'I'll remember,' said Joan.

After this she heard many a talk on hot summer nights. Usually the people talked about such stupid things that she soon went to sleep. Once she had a wonderful time, for Uncle Sandy was talking about the stars and pointing out different constellations to his mother, and Joan could see them all from her bed on the sleeping-porch. But she was sure they always remembered that she was there, for they never talked about her at all. And then, one night, she was waked up by the omnibus rattling past the house.

'I have never liked any one so much,' said Uncle Sandy.

'She is a perfect dear,' said her grandmother.

Again Joan had that warm and comfortable feeling down her back. They were surely talking about her, for her grandmother often called her 'a dear.' Listeners sometimes did hear good things about themselves. She was glad Uncle Sandy liked her so much.

'It is a rare thing, Mother, to come across somebody you'll always like to have around,' he said.

So Uncle Sandy would always like to have her around! That was pleasant, too. But she would not ever want to live with him.

'You must remember she has a very full life and seems extremely happy as she is,' her grandmother said.

Joan was a little puzzled. Of course, she did have a full life, and she was happy, but it was a funny way of putting it.

'She is a little old to change all her ways, and she is rather set in them,' her grandmother went on.

Of course, eight was not so young as seven, but it did seem as if there was still time to change. Could they be talking about some one else, and, if so, whom?

'I think, Sandy,' said her grandmother, 'that before we go any farther we had better

go into the house. We are under the sleeping-porch, and Joan is sometimes wakeful. "Little pitchers have big ears."

Joan was left to wonder what her grandmother meant. She had never seen any pitchers with ears. Did they call the handle an ear? She had never noticed that little pitchers had bigger handles than large pitchers. She would have said it was just the other way around.

The next morning she tried to get up her courage to speak to her grandmother about the mysterious conversation and to find out if they really were talking about her and planning to have her live in Chicago with Uncle Sandy. She should not like that at all — no, not even if he did like her better than any one he had ever seen. She liked a whole lot of people better than she liked Uncle Sandy. She liked him very much, indeed, but not half so well as she liked her grandmother, and she liked dear Harriet Lane better, and Tony Marsh and Laura, and Miss Joanna Saunders. And Maud? No, she liked her uncle much better than she liked Maud. And yet she would miss Maud more than Uncle Sandy. He would not care to play dolls or climb trees, and he would be too busy to tell her stories often.

She began to think over all the people Uncle Sandy seemed to like. Perhaps he wanted to have Nora to cook for him in Chicago. He had praised her griddle-cakes, and said his cook could not make such good ones.

Joan tried again to ask her grandmother whether Uncle Sandy had been talking about her, or about Nora, but every time she started to ask a question something held her back. And, finally, she was so interested in playing with the other children that she forgot all about it.

A few days later, Uncle Sandy had to go back to Chicago, but Joan did not mind this so much because Aunt Joanna was still at the other house. She took the children on delightful expeditions. Once they went to Salem and saw some of the old houses there. And they had picnics by the sea and long walks. At last the day came when she had to go back to the farm. But Joan had hardly had time to miss her before dear Harriet Lane and Asa came to the Marshes' for a visit.

Joan was sorry when the time came for her and her grandmother to leave the seashore, but as her friends in the other cottages were coming home too, and school was to begin, she

settled back contentedly in her old life. In October, Miss Joanna spent a few days with Mrs. Saunders on her way back to Chicago, and Uncle Sandy came on to make his mother a short visit.

‘Have you come to some medical meetings, Uncle Sandy?’ Joan asked.

‘Not this time,’ said Uncle Sandy. ‘I’ve come on purpose to make you and Mother and Betsy a visit.’

The evening before he was to leave he had supper away from home, and he brought Miss Joanna Saunders back with him. They had both of them been looking very happy for the last day or two. Uncle Sandy took Joan up in his lap, which was always a delightful event. Joan’s grandmother went out of the room to speak to Nora about something.

‘We wanted to tell you ourselves what Mother has known for some days,’ he said. ‘Miss Joanna has promised to come and keep house for me in Chicago.’

‘But I thought she lived there already with her sister and the children. What will Emily do without her?’ Joan asked.

‘You think she would much rather live with them?’ said Uncle Sandy. ‘I don’t blame you.

I thought it might be that way myself. You didn't expect this?"

"No," said Joan. "I did hear you talking to Grandmother, but I thought it was me you wanted, or Nora — she is such a good cook."

Both Uncle Sandy and Aunt Joanna began to laugh.

"Come to me, you darling," said Miss Joanna. "Your Uncle Sandy means that I have promised to marry him." She gathered the child in her arms and held her close. "One of the nicest things about it, dear," she said, "is that you and I won't have to be separated, and that I shall really and truly be your Aunt Joanna. You will live with us in Chicago and be our own little girl."

Joan stiffened. She loved Aunt Joanna and Uncle Sandy, but she did not at all like the idea of being their own little girl, if it meant leaving her grandmother and Tony and Laura and Maud and dear Harriet Lane. How could she leave them all? She had a despairing feeling, for Uncle Sandy looked so determined, and had not her grandmother said he always had his way? Uncle Sandy looked at her, and once again he seemed to know what was going on inside her mind.

‘You don’t half like the idea,’ he said, ‘but you will. There are the nicest children in the same block with us in Chicago, and I have many little patients, and there will be your Aunt Joanna’s niece, just your age.’

Joan was silent. At last she said in a very weak voice, ‘But there won’t be Grandmother.’

‘No,’ said Uncle Sandy, ‘but you can make her visits. Your grandmother is an old woman of seventy-six, and not very strong. She is really too old to have the care of a child.’

Joan had thought she was helping to take care of her grandmother. How often she ran up and down stairs for her, and how often she sat by the fire in her room and read aloud to her.

‘She might live to be ninety-one, like her mother,’ said Joan. ‘I should be grown up then, and I could keep house for her.’

‘I really don’t think that your Aunt Joanna would have consented to marry me except that I told her she could then have you for her own little girl,’ said Uncle Sandy, with his whimsical laugh. ‘Your Aunt Joanna is so bent on doing her duty that I really don’t think she would have thought it right to leave her sister just to look after me.’

‘It is like one of our favorite fairy tales,’ said Aunt Joanna. ‘It has such a nice old-fashioned ending, “and they all lived happily together ever after.”’

But Joan did not like the ending at all, and when she went up to her room to bed she felt as if her heart would break. There was a strong east wind, and she thought how high the surf would be on the rocks at Rocky Cove. Would she ever be at Rocky Cove again if she lived with Uncle Sandy and Aunt Joanna? She went over to the mirror, and a very sad face looked back at her.

‘Christabel,’ she said, ‘something awful is going to happen. I am going to live in Chicago with Uncle Sandy and Aunt Joanna.’

‘Well, what of that?’ said Christabel. ‘I should like anything to get out of this old mirror. What of that?’

‘You don’t understand,’ said Joan. ‘Nobody understands. If you had been tossed about like me and had lived first in one place and then in another, and your father and mother had died, and then you had come to live with the dearest grandmother in the whole world, and you had Laura and Tony to play with, and Maud and dear Harriet, and

Tommy and Tilly, you wouldn't want to go away.'

The door opened and Joan's grandmother came into the room. 'So you are not in bed yet,' she said. 'I thought I heard you talking to some one.'

'I was just talking to myself in the looking-glass,' said Joan.

She had never told her grandmother about the looking-glass child.

'You were talking to yourself in the looking-glass?'

'Yes, Grandmother, when I first came and I hadn't any children to play with, or even Tommy and Tilly, I used to pretend the little girl I saw in the glass was a live little girl and make her talk back.'

'You poor child,' said Mrs. Morse. 'I am afraid you had a very lonely time at first, living with an old woman who didn't understand very well about little girls, as she had never had one and had not been a little girl herself for more than seventy years. But all that will be changed now, for dear Joanna understands children so well, and so does Sandy; and there will be her niece, Emily, to play with.'

Joan seized her grandmother's hand. 'Oh, Grandmother,' she said, 'please let me stay with you. I won't be a care, truly, I won't. And if you are sick, I'll take such good care of you. And I'll run up and down stairs twenty times a day for your glasses; and when I'm bigger, I'll keep house. Oh, Grandmother, please, please let me stay. Do you really want me to go? Am I such a lot of bother? I'll be carefuller of my clothes and not get them torn, so I won't have to have new ones so often. And I'll be a lot better child, and I won't ask so many questions, if you'll only let me stay.'

Joan looked up and saw that there were tears in her grandmother's eyes.

'You little darling,' she said, 'you precious child! Do you suppose I want you to go? But, as Sandy says, I am an old woman, and old women don't know anything about bringing up little girls in the modern way. I'm sure you will be very happy with them, once you are settled, and I must not be selfish. After all, I have lived without you for seventy-five years, as Sandy says.'

'That's all the more reason you shouldn't live without me any longer,' said Joan. 'I'm going to be just as selfish as I can be, Grand-

mother. I'm just going to be the most selfish little girl and do what I please, and live with you, if they'll let me.'

'You dear child,' said Mrs. Morse. 'But Sandy is always so determined. And, as he is a doctor, he generally knows what is best. If it is going to be better for my dear Joan to live with younger people, I ought not, I cannot stand in the way.'

'It won't be better, it would be very much worse. I should cry myself sick.'

'You would do nothing of the kind. You would be a brave little girl, if you had to go. And you'd soon get used to the new life.'

'Do you want me to go? Am I too much care?' Joan asked tremulously.

'Do I want you to go? Oh, my darling, you are the greatest comfort in the world.'

'Then I shan't go,' said Joan. 'They can't make me. I shall stay right here.'

'But your Uncle Sandy is so determined. And he is sure it is for the best.'

'I am sure it is for the best for me to stay right here,' said Joan.

'But you are a little girl, only eight and a half years old. We must be brave if the separation has to come.'

After her grandmother had gone out of the room, Joan lay for a long time thinking. It was true she was only a little girl and Uncle Sandy was a big, strong man. Sometimes she had a despairing feeling that she would have to do what he said. But, anyway, she would tell him just how she felt. It might not sound very polite, and Joan hated to hurt people's feelings, but she could not help that. She loved Aunt Joanna, and she loved Uncle Sandy, but she loved her grandmother much the best.

The next morning, when Uncle Sandy and Aunt Joanna were about to start on the journey to Chicago, Joan had her mind made up. Miss Joanna had come around from her sister-in-law's house for a last call. They were all sitting in the parlor together, for Mrs. Morse had come down to breakfast, as it was Uncle Sandy's last morning.

'Well, little girl,' said Uncle Sandy, 'it won't be long before Joanna and I are married, and then I shall come on for you, and you'll be living with us.'

'Didn't Grandmother tell you I'd rather live with her?' said Joan.

'She did say something of the kind,' said

Uncle Sandy. 'But you'll be coming to her for visits. And what does a little girl of eight know about what is good for her?'

'I'm eight and a half, Uncle Sandy.'

'What does a little girl of eight and a half know about it?'

'Grandmother wants me to stay with her, and I want to stay.'

He looked at his mother, who had a beseeching look in her eyes, and then at Joan. It was one of the times when Uncle Sandy seemed to get inside of people. Aunt Joanna looked at them, too.

'After all, Sandy,' she said, 'perhaps we ought to let them choose. Perhaps it is one of the times when they know better what is best for them both than we can know.'

Joan went straight over to her grandmother. 'I belong to Grandmother,' she said.

THE END



